

## POLITICIZATION AND RESISTANCE IN THE ZIMBABWEAN NATIONAL ARMY

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### ABSTRACT

While the dominant discourse in Zimbabwe on and about soldiers is that they are perpetrators of political violence, this does not always reflect the lived experiences of soldiers who joined the army in post-independence Zimbabwe. Based on army deserters' narratives emerging from 44 life history interviews and two focus groups, this article argues that not all soldiers have been supportive of President Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF. Rather, ZANU-PF had to work quite hard to ensure the political loyalty of its soldiers, who often resisted and challenged ZANU-PF political coercion. The barracks constituted a site in which 'military professionalism' and 'politics' were at loggerheads. The article analyses the ways in which these army deserters were spied on, punished, demoted, and detained: practices which they all contend were politicized by partisan commanders in the barracks.

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WHILE THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE IN ZIMBABWE is that since the elections in 2000 soldiers have been perpetrators of political violence against civilians,<sup>1</sup> this article shows that soldiers also became victims while serving under President Robert Mugabe's regime. It does so by examining the experiences of army deserters who joined the army in post-independence Zimbabwe, and who are therefore not veterans of the country's liberation struggle (these more recent recruits are termed *Mafikizolos*).<sup>2</sup> The normal

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1. Brian Raftopoulos, 'The crisis in Zimbabwe, 1998–2008', in Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo (eds), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A history from the pre-colonial period to 2008* (Weaver Press, Harare, 2009), pp. 201–32; James Muzondidya, 'From buoyancy to crisis, 1980–1997', in Raftopoulos and Mlambo, *Becoming Zimbabwe*, pp. 167–200; Lloyd Sachikonye, *When a state turns on its citizens: Institutionalised violence and political culture* (Jacana Media Publishers, Auckland Park, 2011).

2. *Mafikizolo* is a derogatory Ndebele term that means 'those who came yesterday' (and thus have no memory of the liberation war or firm rooting, so are easily swayed). *Mafikizolo* differ from the so called 'authentic' war veterans. I use the term *Mafikizolo* because my

process through which soldiers could resign was stopped because those who wished to resign were perceived to support the opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Morgan Tsvangirai.<sup>3</sup> The article attends to the ways in which victimization, harassment, punishment, and detention were enacted against *Mafikizolo* soldiers in the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) barracks, eventually leading them to desert. It reveals how senior officers deployed political surveillance tactics against *Mafikizolo*, and how the latter resisted such political actions through the sabotage of order and, ultimately, by desertion. Such insights cast light on how military order is maintained and subverted in many post-liberation armed forces in Africa and beyond.

Although some commentators may have assumed that the ZNA has always been pro-President Robert Mugabe and his nationalist ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), this article shows that this was not always the case. ZANU-PF has needed to work quite hard to ensure the political loyalty of its soldiers. Even though generals and other partisan commanders publicly support ZANU-PF and President Mugabe,<sup>4</sup> *Mafikizolo* soldiers contest such practices in the army barracks, often construing them as unprofessional. *Mafikizolo* soldiers considered themselves professionals, unwilling to play the partisan roles asked of them. The article draws upon broader debates about the relationship between the military and society, engaging with authors as diverse as Samuel Huntington, who is associated with the notion of the civilian domination of the military, or 'leaving politics to civilians',<sup>5</sup> and Michel Foucault's idea of the barrack as a 'diagram of power'.<sup>6</sup> However, it maintains that professionalism goes beyond the disengagement of the military from politics, arguing that professionalism encompasses the ways in which generals and senior officers relate to the rank and file within the barracks. How soldiers remain connected to or become disconnected from the military is an important symptom of broader state-society relations in Africa and elsewhere.

The phenomenon of military involvement in politics is, of course, not unique to Zimbabwe. Thus, while Huntington argues that civilian

informants use it in their stories to distinguish themselves from former guerrilla 'war veterans' who are currently still serving in the army.

3. The MDC led by Morgan Tsvangirai is the biggest opposition political party to emerge in Zimbabwe. In 1999 it challenged ZANU-PF, winning 57 out of 120 constituencies in the house of assembly elections in 2000. It is supported by the majority of the urban youth, and won a majority of parliamentary seats in the 2008 elections.

4. Blessing-Miles Tendi, 'State intelligence and the politics of Zimbabwe's presidential succession', *African Affairs* 115, 459 (2016), pp. 203–24.

5. Samuel Huntington, *The soldier and the state: The theory and politics of civil-military relations* (Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA, 1957).

6. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (Vintage Books, New York, NY, 1977), p. 171.

politicians must dictate policy to the military,<sup>7</sup> the article reveals that being under civilian leadership does not necessarily make the military professional. This is evident in post-colonial African undemocratic states where the military senior officers purport to be professional soldiers while they are actively involved in civilian politics.<sup>8</sup> In Uganda, the military has been deeply involved in politics, as evidenced by the political appointment of army generals to government ministries under President Yoweri Museveni.<sup>9</sup> For example, former Chief of Defence Forces Aronda Nyakairima was appointed Internal Minister in 2013, and Lieutenant General Robert Rusoke was ambassador to South Sudan.<sup>10</sup> For Huntington, a professional military seeks to distance itself from politics, recognizing the risk that political leanings overrule ability, education, and expertise in the selection and appointment of officers.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, Zoltan Barany emphasized that African militaries are an obstacle to democratic rule.<sup>12</sup> This has been the case in North African countries such as Egypt, where the military are intimately involved in everyday politics.<sup>13</sup> In such a context, there is an unwritten mutual agreement between military generals and politicians, since politicians influence generals' benefits and interests in return for their loyalty and allegiance to the regime.<sup>14</sup> Huntington contends that 'in practice, officership is strongest and most effective when it most closely approaches the professional ideal; it is weakest and most defective when it falls short of that ideal'.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the argument here is that even though the army generals in the Zimbabwean context subordinate themselves to President Robert Mugabe, this does

7. Huntington, *The soldier and the state*; See also Andrew Cottey, Timothy Edmunds, and Anthony Forster, 'The second generation problematic: Rethinking democracy and civil-military relations', *Armed Forces and Society* 29, 1 (2002), pp. 31–56; Douglas Bland, 'A unified theory of civil-military relations', *Armed Forces and Society* 26, 1 (1999), pp. 7–26; Rebecca Schiff, 'Civil-military relations reconsidered: A theory of concordance', *Armed forces and Society* 22, 1 (1995), pp. 7–24.

8. Tendi, 'State intelligence and the politics of Zimbabwe's presidential succession'.

9. Aili Mari Tripp, *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of power in a hybrid regime* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, 2010).

10. Risdell Kasasira, 'Who is who? List of UPDF top brass and what they do', *Daily Monitor*, Kampala, 27 November 2014 <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/arts/culture/Reviews/Who-is-who-List-of-UPDF-top-brass-and-what-they-do/-/691232/2536060/-/hct888/-/index.html>> (5 July 2015).

11. Huntington, *The soldier and the state*, p. 84; See also Barry Rubin, 'The military in contemporary Middle East politics', *Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal* 5, 1 (2001), pp. 47–63.

12. Zoltan Barany, *The soldier and the changing state: Building democratic armies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NY, 2012).

13. Zoltan Barany, 'Comparing the Arab revolts: The role of the military', *Journal of Democracy* 22, 4 (2011), pp. 28–39; Holger Albrecht and Dina Bishara, 'Back on horseback: The military and political transformation in Egypt', *Middle East Law and Governance* 3 (2011), pp. 13–23; Imad Harb, 'The Egyptian military in politics: Disengagement or accommodation?' *Middle East Journal* 57, 2 (2003), pp. 269–90.

14. Rubin, 'The military in contemporary Middle East politics'.

15. Huntington, *The soldier and the state*, p. 11.

not make them professionals. In fact they have remained an armed appendage of President Mugabe and ZANU-PF.

In substantiating this argument, I focus on two personal accounts, interwoven with other *Mafikizolo* soldiers' stories, to bring to life the ways in which these former soldiers were persecuted for their political views (real or perceived), which conflicted with those of their commanding officers. In the end they felt they had no other choice than to desert from the ZNA and seek refuge in South Africa. I interviewed a number of these army deserters in exile in Johannesburg, South Africa, between 2009 and 2012. Having been a soldier in the Zimbabwe National Army for more than 10 years, it was much easier to access their stories, as we had known each other in barracks in Zimbabwe and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) deployment from 1998 to 2002. I interviewed 44 army deserters in total. In presenting their stories, I use pseudonyms derived from the phonetic alphabet used by the military (Charlie Mike, Whisky Papa, Alpha Romeo, etc.). First, I provide a background of the ZNA and how it became politicized in the unfolding of the post-2000 crisis. Then I present some of the army deserters' stories of victimization and persecution in the army barracks, which they interpreted as having political origins.

### *Post-colonial history of the Zimbabwe National Army*

A brief historical account of the Zimbabwe National Army is important when one seeks to understand how far it has shifted from its professional ethics. In 1980, at Zimbabwean independence, the army was formed from Rhodesian armed forces and the two former liberation armed groups: the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) led by Robert Mugabe; and the Zimbabwe Patriotic Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African Patriotic Union (ZAPU) led by the late Joshua Nkomo. The whole exercise of integrating the forces was undertaken under the guidance of the British Military Advisory and Training Team until 2001, to professionalize and regularize standard principles of training, policies, and organization.<sup>16</sup>

However, early in 1983 violence within the army became widespread between former ZANLA and ZIPRA combatants. In an illuminating study, Jocelyn Alexander emphasized that there was a 'history of

16. Blessing-Miles Tendi, 'Ideology, civilian authority and the Zimbabwean military', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, 4 (2013), pp. 829–43; Eric Young, 'Chefs and worried soldiers: Authority and power in the Zimbabwe National Army', *Armed forces and Society* 24, 1 (1997), pp. 133–49; Martin Rupiya, 'The "expanding torrent": British military assistance to the Southern African region', *African Security Review* 5, 4 (1996), pp. 51–9.

animosity and distrust within and between ZAPU and ZANU PF and their respective armed wings, ZIPRA and ZANLA'.<sup>17</sup> They had different operational areas, which left them dominated by different language groups, ZIPRA by Ndebele speakers and ZANLA by Shona speakers. After independence these divisions continued to exist in terms of political loyalty.<sup>18</sup> After the formation of the ZNA, former ZIPRA and ZANLA members remained on edge, each fearing attack by the other. In army barracks, tensions ran high: 'ZANLA and ZIPRA each suspected the other of concealing arms, and ZIPRA members noticed the escalating arrest and disappearance of cadres from their ranks.'<sup>19</sup> Such persecutions were political and led to the mass desertion of ZIPRA members.<sup>20</sup> Those who remained in the army were demoted and posted to different battalions.

The emergence of the dissidents fuelled the *Gukurahundi*, a term which means the early spring rains that washes the chaff. The *Gukurahundi* was an operation carried out by the Fifth Brigade, a pro-Mugabe unit of soldiers trained by the North Korean military and deployed to hunt down the 'dissidents', mainly Ndebele people residing in Midlands and Matabeleland provinces. More than 20,000 civilians were reportedly killed.<sup>21</sup> In 1986, deserters were given amnesty, and a unity accord was affected in 1987 between ZAPU and ZANU PF. Nkomo became Vice-President, and Mugabe retained the post of President.

Both this research and Alexander's study document ZNA deserters' experiences, including political tensions between soldiers aligned with ZANU PF and other parties. Whereas Alexander's study focused on former ZIPRA liberation-war fighters who were of the Ndebele ethnic group and whose repression was political and premised on their ethnic background, this article explores how a group of ZNA soldiers experienced persecution even in the absence of clear links with dissident political factions, despite allegations of close links to the MDC. In contrast to Alexander's findings that victimization targeted mainly Ndebele soldiers who were affiliated to ZIPRA and ZAPU, in my research evidence emerged of persecution experienced by both Shona- and Ndebele-speaking soldiers. This can be understood as a feature of the deep politicization of the military.

17. Jocelyn Alexander, 'Dissident perspectives on Zimbabwe's post-independence war', *Africa* 68, 2 (1998), pp. 151–82, p. 152.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJP), 'Report on the 80s atrocities in Matabeleland and the Midlands (CCJP, 1997), p. 44 <<http://www.rhodesia.nl/Matabeleland%20Report.pdf>> (23 July 2014).

20. Alexander, 'Dissident perspectives on Zimbabwe's post-independence war', p. 156.

21. Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, 'Report on the 80s atrocities'.

In the late 1980s the Zimbabwe National Army recruited the first intake of soldiers who had not participated in the liberation war.<sup>22</sup> However, the recruitment of soldiers beyond the ranks of guerrillas does not mark the beginning of the professionalization of the ZNA. Rather, the reasons for such recruitments were twofold: to support an aging group of veteran soldiers who had served in the liberation army, and for deployment in the armed conflicts in Mozambique (1986–92) and the Democratic Republic of Congo war (1998–2002). While guerrillas who fought in the Zimbabwean liberation war from the 1960s to the late 1970s had clear political affiliations with either ZANU-PF or ZAPU,<sup>23</sup> this was not so for the new recruits, whose experiences became the subject of my research. At the time of joining the military, these soldiers viewed the army as a professional outfit, which included good food (including bacon at breakfast, fruit, et cetera), good clothing, and an apolitical role.

In the post-2000 period, however, the army became much more politicized, publicly supporting President Mugabe while denigrating the opposition.<sup>24</sup> For example, the late General Zvinavashe indicated in public speeches that he would never salute leaders who did not have liberation credentials.<sup>25</sup> This was directed at Morgan Tsvangirai, who had not participated in the liberation struggle. Even though Blessing-Miles Tendi has argued that not all army generals were pro-Mugabe,<sup>26</sup> very few of them publicly stated their opinions when civilians were beaten during elections.

Military involvement in perpetrating political violence became more apparent, culminating in the 2008 election violence.<sup>27</sup> This included the violent takeover of the Chiadzwa diamond mines, under the guise of protecting state resources from artisanal miners popularly known as

22. Young, 'Chefs and worried soldiers'.

23. Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor, 'War stories: Guerrilla narratives of Zimbabwe's liberation war', *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004), pp. 79–100; Fay Chung, *Re-living the Second Chimurenga: Memories from the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe* (Nordic African Institute and Weaver Press, Stockholm, 2006); Wilfred Mhanda, *Dzino: Memories of a freedom fighter* (Weaver Press, Harare, 2011); Alexander, 'Dissident perspectives on Zimbabwe's post-independence war'.

24. Martin Rupiya, 'The military factor in Zimbabwe's political and electoral affairs' (SW Radio Africa, 2011), <<http://www.swradioafrica.com/Documents/The%20Military%20Factor%20in%20Zimbabwe.pdf>> (1 June 2014); Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Making sense of Mugabeism in local and global politics: "So Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe"', *Third World Quarterly* 30, 6 (2009), pp. 1139–58. See also Abiodun Alao, *Mugabe and the politics of security in Zimbabwe* (McGill-Queens University Press, London, Montreal, and Kingston, 2012).

25. See Tendi, 'Ideology, civilian authority and the Zimbabwean military'.

26. *Ibid.*

27. JoAnn McGregor, 'Surveillance and the city: Patronage, power-sharing and the politics of urban control in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, 4 (2013), pp. 783–805; Muzondiyi, 'From buoyancy to crisis, 1980–1997'.

*magwenja*.<sup>28</sup> In the process, civilians were injured under Operation Hakudzokwi (Area of No Return), in which the army conducted warlike operations.<sup>29</sup> The militarization of state institutions extended to prisons, local government, and the Attorney General's office.<sup>30</sup> According to Alexander, soldiers serving in the Zimbabwean National Army joined the prison service as senior officers and this affected prison administration, as these soldiers lacked a necessary knowledge of the institution in which they now served.<sup>31</sup> While the Zimbabwe Defence Act (Chapter 11.2) states that no member of the military can be involved in politics, senior officers have crossed that line in what has been described as the 'politicization of the military'.<sup>32</sup> Since this period, soldiers in Zimbabwe have been perceived as anti-democratic beneficiaries of Robert Mugabe's patron-client relationships, and as agents of political violence in support of what Terence Ranger has called 'Mugabe-ism'.<sup>33</sup>

According to Brian Raftopoulos, the Joint Operation Command of the armed forces directed most of the political violence against civilians.<sup>34</sup> The military, under the command of ZANU-PF, approached successive post-2000 elections as 'battles' in which political opponents were viewed as enemies to be annihilated rather than as political competitors.<sup>35</sup> While Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that Mugabe has never been tolerant of opposition since Zimbabwean independence in 1980,<sup>36</sup> Ranger notes that Mugabe shifted from 'nationalist historiography', which advocated a welfare agenda and reconstruction, to 'patriotic history', which divides the nation into black and white, 'patriots' and 'sell-outs'.<sup>37</sup> The argument in this article is that the military, especially the senior officers, had deviated

28. Tinashe Nyamunda and Patience Mukwambo, 'The state and the bloody diamond rush in Chiadzwa: Unpacking the contesting interests in the development of illicit mining and trading, c. 2006–2009', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, 1 (2012), pp. 145–66.

29. See Richard Saunders, 'Genealogies of power: Blood diamonds, security politics and Zimbabwe's troubled transition', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 32, 3 (2014), pp. 378–94; Richard Saunders, 'Crisis, capital, compromise: Mining and empowerment in Zimbabwe', *African Sociological Review* 12, 1 (2008), pp. 67–87.

30. Jocelyn Alexander, 'Militarisation and state institutions: "Professionals" and "soldiers" inside the Zimbabwe Prison Service', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, 4 (2013), pp. 807–28; Susan Verheul, "'Rebels" and "good boys": Patronage, intimidation and resistance in Zimbabwe's Attorney General's office after 2000', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, 4 (2013), pp. 765–82; McGregor, 'Surveillance and the city'.

31. Alexander, 'Militarisation and state institutions'.

32. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'The crisis of adapting history in Zimbabwe', in Laurence Raw and Define Ersin Tutan (eds), *The adaptation of history: Essays on ways of telling the past* (McFarland and Co., Jefferson, NC, 2013), pp. 129–52.

33. Terence Ranger, 'Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: The struggle over the past in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, 2 (2004), pp. 215–34.

34. Raftopoulos, 'The crisis in Zimbabwe'.

35. Muzondidya, 'From buoyancy to crisis'.

36. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Making sense of Mugabeism in local and global politics'.

37. Ranger, 'Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation'.

from their mandate of upholding a professional army and became a political arm of the Mugabe regime, producing practices of resistance in the form of desertion amongst the rank and file.

By 2008, economic and political crises had taken a toll on the economy. The market was considered to be *kupenga* ('mad' in ChiShona) and the economy was *kukiya-kiya*, a phrase which points to an indescribable scenario in which the normal strategies of life are rendered useless.<sup>38</sup> The continuing political violence, economic decline, and other crises profoundly affected soldiers in the barracks.

### *Soldiers as victims in the army barracks*

While it is not the purpose of this article to delve into the genealogies of violence within guerrilla armed wings, it is important to note that its practice in the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) is not a new phenomenon, but is historically rooted, dating back to the 1960s when ZANU PF was formed as a breakaway from ZAPU. Gerald Mazarire has provided an account of how ZANLA punished its members to instil discipline.<sup>39</sup> In addition, former liberation fighters like Wilfred Mhanda<sup>40</sup> and Fay Chung<sup>41</sup> have revealed how guerrillas used punishment to settle personal scores.

The stories of Charlie Mike and Whisky Papa (both deserters) and other former soldiers reveal continuous persecution in the barracks. What *Mafikizolo* soldiers experienced was not very different from the guerrilla modes of punishment during the liberation struggle.<sup>42</sup> However, in this article I am interested in the ways in which political victimization was targeted at a particular generation of soldiers: those with no liberation history, serving under the command of former guerrilla/veterans. Whilst professionalism is quite uneven in the history of the ZNA, I selected the narratives of Whisky Papa and Charlie Mike for two reasons. First, they joined the army in 1986 and 1995, respectively, when the ZNA was still regarded as professional in its conduct. Thus they understand the process of change in the ZNA's professional ethics and how it became increasingly politicized. Second, these soldiers were deployed in Mozambique (1986–1992) and the Democratic Republic of Congo war (1998–2002), demonstrating that they also have a history of participating in conflict.

38. Jeremy Jones, 'Freeze! movement, narrative and the disciplining of price in hyperinflationary Zimbabwe', *Social Dynamics* 36, 2 (2010), pp. 338–51; Jeremy Jones, "'Nothing is straight in Zimbabwe": The rise of the Kukiya-kiya economy 2000–2008', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, 2 (2010), pp. 285–99.

39. Gerald Chikozho Mazarire, 'Discipline and punishment in ZANLA: 1964–1979', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, 3 (2011), pp. 571–91.

40. Mhanda, *Dzino*.

41. Chung, 'Re-living the Second Chimurenga'.

42. Mazarire, 'Discipline and punishment in ZANLA'.



Charlie Mike was first posted to an infantry battalion, and he later joined the signals regiment. In the DRC war, he was a signaller. Whisky Papa had worked as a Special Force Commando and was later posted to an infantry brigade. In the Zimbabwe army barracks, they were later victimized and demoted from their ranks in processes of political retribution, rather than normal army punishment. My intention here is not to generalize the soldiers' experiences of political persecution in the barracks. However, their stories are not exceptional; many other soldiers have had similar experiences during the post-2000 crisis. The post-2000 situation in the barracks was so intrinsically political that every battalion, corps, and rank came under political surveillance, as conducted notably by the Zimbabwe Military Intelligence Corps (ZIC), the Special Investigation Branch (SIB), and the Military Police (MP).

Even those responsible for policing other soldiers, such as the military police and intelligence corps, deserted during the years of political crisis. Some junior soldiers in the intelligence corps were also suspected of 'selling out' classified information to the MDC. This was similar to those in the signal corps, responsible for sending and receiving information about the ZNA to and from army headquarters, who were viewed as gossiping with the MDC on military operations and deployments in and outside the country. Soldiers from the Zimbabwe Army Pay and Record were also accused of exposing army generals' pay slips and benefits. In some cases, commanding officers punished *Mafikizolo* soldiers in order to suit their own political goals and to target soldiers thought to be sympathetic to, or members of, the MDC. Career success became primarily about how soldiers played (or remained out of) ZANU-PF politics.

In the Zimbabwean army, desertion is defined by the Defence Act (Chapter 11.2, paragraph 40.2a) as the conduct of any member of the armed forces who absents him/herself without leave for a continuous period of thirty days or more. This includes leaving the military without following proper channels. Applying for resignation to army headquarters means a soldier submits the intention to resign, citing their reasons for such a decision. This has to be recommended and approved by the hierarchy of command: Officer Commanding (OC), Commanding Officer (CO), Brigade commander and army headquarters. Then a signal of approval will then be sent back to the battalion in which the soldier is stationed. The soldier must surrender all uniforms, tin or barrack utensils, and all other things issued to him/her on joining the military. However, when a soldier lodged an application to resign from the military it often began a process of political victimization. My interviewees perceived deserting from the army as a response to constant arrests and indefinite detentions. It was a means to free oneself from repressive army commanders and the partisan soldiers in military intelligence and the military

police. It was a response to tension within the army between senior officers and *Mafikizolo* soldiers, in which the latter were the victims. However, it is not clear how many soldiers deserted the Zimbabwe army. While Scott Baldauf reports that between the years 2000 and 2007 more than 1,500 soldiers deserted,<sup>43</sup> the *Zimbabwean News* estimated that 7,000 were living in exile in South Africa.<sup>44</sup> Other accounts reiterate that there has been an ‘exodus’ of soldiers who deserted the ZNA.<sup>45</sup> However, despite all these reports, the Zimbabwe National Army has not released figures of army deserters.

The Zimbabwean army’s desertions are not unique in post-colonial Africa. The Ugandan Ministry of Defence has reported that more than one thousand junior soldiers desert the military every year, citing low morale in the barracks and low salaries, while the government promoted and paid hefty salaries to army generals.<sup>46</sup> In Eritrea army deserters are reported to have gone into exile in Ethiopia, citing political victimization.<sup>47</sup> In the Democratic Republic of Congo, government soldiers have deserted and joined the rebel formations operating as militias.<sup>48</sup>

Neither is army desertion solely an African phenomenon. Writing about US soldiers who deserted the military, Robert Fantina asked: ‘What, exactly, causes a soldier, sometimes with a history of battle campaigns, to say “enough”?’<sup>49</sup> The answers he found range from brutal corporal punishment in the military, illegal/unfair legal proceedings by court martial, different sentencing on the same offence, and low salaries. This was similar to Arthur Gilbert’s historical findings on why British soldiers deserted the military in the eighteenth century: ‘pay was very low . . . a common

43. Scott Baldauf, ‘Zimbabwe Army’s deserters underscore country’s troubles’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 25 April 2007, <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0425/p04s01-woaf.html>> (20 August 2014).

44. ‘ZNA deserters fight for justice’, *The Zimbabwean News*, 5 August 2011, <<http://www.thezimbabwean.co/2011/08/zna-deserters-fight-for-justice/>> (20 July 2014).

45. Zakeus Chibaya and Wilf Mbanga, ‘Zimbabwe: Mass desertions from ZNA’, *The Zimbabwean News*, 18 November 2005, <[http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/old/nov18a\\_2005.html](http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/old/nov18a_2005.html)> (20 July 2014).

46. Yasiin Mugerwa, ‘More than 1,000 soldiers desert army annually’, *Daily Monitor*, 9 May 2013, <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/-More-than-1-000-soldiers-desert-army-annually-/-/688334/1846636/-/13gs2x3z/-/index.html>> (23 July 2015); Godfrey Ojore and Simon Naulele, ‘Uganda: No alarm over army deserters’, *New Vision*, 6 May 2013, <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201305062232.html>> (6 July 2015).

47. ‘Dozens of Eritrean mutineers killed says army deserter’, *Sudan Tribune*, 30 September 2013, <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article48227>> (6 July 2015).

48. Thembo Kahungu Misairi, Enid Ninsiima, and Risdell Kasasira, ‘UPDF arrests 11 Congolese army deserters’, *Daily Monitor*, 5 September 2013 <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/UPDF-arrests-11-Congolese-army-deserters-/-/688334/1979976/-/format/xhtml/-/yh3s4iz/-/index.html>> (11 July 2015); ‘8 Congo army deserters handed over’ *New Vision*, 24 April 2007, <[http://www.newvision.co.ug/new\\_vision/news/1166407/congo-army-deserters-handed](http://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1166407/congo-army-deserters-handed)> (10 July 2015).

49. Robert Fantina, *Desertion and the American soldier 1776–2006* (Algora Publishing, New York, NY, 2006), pp. 6 and 202.

soldier regularly lived on the border of starvation'.<sup>50</sup> Edward Shils reached a similar conclusion: for him, even though American soldiers invoked the injustice of the Vietnam War in which they were deployed, desertion was rarely a result of political beliefs.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast, in the Zimbabwean context, even though the country's economy was in crisis, with salaries equivalent to US\$10 per month for civil servants and the armed forces, deserters rarely referred to the economic crisis in explaining their decision to leave the military. Victimization and 'politics' in the barracks were the primary factors that drove them out of the army. This is supported by the personal accounts of the *Mafikizolo* soldiers.

*Charlie Mike and some of his comrades*

Charlie Mike was born in 1975 in Shurugwi in the central part of Zimbabwe. He joined the army in 1995 with the encouragement of his father, a former soldier. On completion of his basic military training, he was attached to the Signals Corps as an operator and later became a Detachment Commander. Between 1998 and 2002 he was deployed to the war zone in the Democratic Republic of Congo. When he returned, the situation in the army had become difficult:

You know, actually why I deserted the military. Ah, we went for some campaigns . . . ja, political campaigns which I do not think were good for the soldiers. The army would check where you come from and tell you to go and campaign for ZANU-PF in your province. So when I was campaigning in my province, you see, I could move with my father's young brother, my uncles, my nephews, I could move with those people but they were not, ah, ZANU-PF supporters or sympathizers. So when they see me moving with these people, they would say, now look at this soldier he is moving around with these opposition people so he is not, ah, ah, a ZANU-PF soldier, he's an opposition soldier. But they did not consider that the person that I'm moving with, he's my father's brother, he's my uncle, he's my nephew, blood relatives who support their own party. I support my own party but the fact remains that these are my blood relatives.<sup>52</sup>

This reveals how concerned the ZNA was to keep its soldiers loyal to ZANU-PF, using threats and by instilling fear into the *Mafikizolo* rank and file. According to Lewis Coser and Mady Wechsler Segal, like the family the military is a 'greedy institution'.<sup>53</sup> They both demand time, commitment, and loyalty from the individual. For these army deserters,

50. Arthur Gilbert, 'Why men deserted from the eighteenth-century British army', *Armed Forces and Society* 6, 4 (1980) pp. 553–67, p. 554.

51. Edward Shils, 'A profile of the military deserter', *Armed Forces and Society* 3, 3 (1977), pp. 427–32, p. 428.

52. Interview, Charlie Mike, Johannesburg, 13 May 2012.

53. Lewis Coser, *Greedy institutions: Patterns of undivided commitment* (The Free Press, New York, NY, 1974); Mady Wechsler Segal, 'The military and the family as greedy institutions', *Armed Forces and Society* 13, 1 (1986), pp. 9–38, p. 10.

on deployment to their village or locations, they were torn between companionship with their families and executing their combative duties, which were now largely political. In their narratives they juxtapose the barracks and their village. The former was viewed as a ‘total institution’,<sup>54</sup> where freedom of speech and movement was curtailed, guided by military standing orders. In contrast, Charlie Mike emphasized that deployment into civilian communities was seen as a space with relative freedom from the close surveillance of the generals and military intelligence.

However, the distinction between the two could be very blurred, as the practices of surveillance entered almost every space, including soldiers’ social lives. Delta Echo, who worked in the Engineering Regiment, noted: ‘I was told that I have a similar surname with one of the MDC senators, so I would not be deployed outside the camp. I thought it was a joke, but it happened.’<sup>55</sup> Even outside the barracks soldiers had to carry with them a particular ideology, a way of thinking, behaving, and acting. It referred to the ideological notion that a soldier had to prioritize ‘the nation’ before anything else, including family. However, in this context, ‘the nation’ meant ZANU-PF and President Mugabe.

Thus, soldiers had to conform to the reality that ZANU-PF took precedence over everyone else, including one’s family. Soldiers had to live by ‘orders’ from above, which also permeated into their everyday lives outside the barracks. Being a soldier during the Zimbabwean political crisis meant spearheading ZANU-PF campaigns and propagating ZANU-PF ideology, whatever the soldiers themselves or their families believed in. Charlie Mike noted that he had family responsibilities and also a right to choose which political party he wanted to support and vote for.

While Charlie Mike was expected to move around with ZANU-PF supporters, he prioritized his family members. They, however, supported the MDC. The lack of liberty to freely interact with his family became a source of dissatisfaction for him in his dealings with military authority. Charlie Mike argued that being a soldier should not turn him into an enemy of his family, regardless of their political sympathies. He stated that:

I moved with them because they are my blood relatives, not because they are MDC. But these ZANU-PF people were saying, no, you’re moving with them so you are one of them. So they had to withdraw me from this campaign. I went back to the barracks. [Pause.] They started harassing me.<sup>56</sup>

In Foucauldian terms, we could understand this as a kind of ‘functional surveillance’ that is not only disciplinary but also represents power

54. Ervin Goffman, *Asylums* (Penguin, London, 1961).

55. Interview, Delta Echo, Johannesburg, 10 June 2012.

56. Interview, Charlie Mike, Johannesburg, 13 May 2012.

enacted on and through individuals.<sup>57</sup> Sending Charlie Mike back to the barracks is a form of surveillance and a ‘technique of controlling’ rogue soldiers.<sup>58</sup> JoAnn McGregor argues that surveillance was a more subtle way of controlling those who were perceived to be MDC supporters.<sup>59</sup> Surveillance invokes and carries with it a threat that is both real and imaginary. It is real in the sense that it can manifest in physical violence, and it is imaginary because sometimes it only exists in the psyche. As such, the barracks became a space to manage soldiers according to ZANU-PF ideals:

They marched me into Officer Commanding orders, and they quoted one dubious Defence Act (rule) called disobeying lawful command when I was referred to the Commanding officers’ orders . . . ah, then to Brigadier. I was detained in the Detention Barracks (DB) for 40 days with heavy punishment.<sup>60</sup>

Soldiers perceive being confined to the barracks as a form of punishment. Being in such a space means a soldier can be dealt with effectively. Thus, for Foucault, the army barracks is an ‘artificial city, a diagram of power that acts by means of general visibility, built and reshaped to exercise power over armed men’.<sup>61</sup> The military way of life in the barracks – saluting the senior officers, and other military activities such as drills – enforces the compliance of soldiers with the rigid military code of conduct. In such instances, Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate talk about ‘military victimhood’,<sup>62</sup> which refers to the ways in which soldiers have become victims in wars they are made to fight. Being detained not only affects the individual, but other soldiers as well. It sends a warning signal to those who are deemed ‘disobedient’. Even though life in the military is about obeying orders, in some cases some soldiers stuck to their principles, especially during the June 2008 presidential run-off. Charlie Romeo states:

During the 2008 presidential run-off all the soldiers were asked to come and vote inside the camp. They used our force numbers for each soldier to vote and each soldier voted under his company. Some soldiers did not come, and there was *Operation Chigunwe chitsvuku* (Operation red finger). We were paraded and they inspected who had voted. I was one of the soldiers who were in the camp, but I decided not to vote because I did not want to be herded like goats to vote for President Mugabe and ZANU PF. So I and others with no red finger were immediately detained without trial; we were told that, because MDC had withdrawn from the elections, now you don’t want to vote. I and other soldiers were told to sleep with no blankets – detained by the military police.<sup>63</sup>

57. Foucault, *Discipline and punish*, p. 177.

58. *Ibid.*

59. McGregor, ‘Surveillance and the city’.

60. Interview, Charlie Mike, Johannesburg, 13 May 2012.

61. Foucault, *Discipline and punish*, p. 171.

62. Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate, ‘The soldier as victim: Peering through the looking glass’, *British Journal of Criminology* 51, 6 (2011), pp. 900–17.

63. Interview, Charlie Romeo, Johannesburg, 21 July 2012.

Individual soldiers thus resisted their orders and ZANU-PF, even in the structured environment of the military. While agency is usually seen as a positive attribute, in the military it is the opposite. Soldiers were inspected and those who did not vote were suspected of harbouring MDC sympathies and were consequently detained. The military uses punishment as a way of thwarting soldiers' agency in particular areas. Those who acted against their orders were perceived as 'sell-outs'. Bravo Lima, who was in the infantry battalion, recounted a similar experience. He states that, 'I was told that you will show me your ZANU-PF vote' or '*tokutamba yechicomrade*' (meaning: either you prove to us that you are a ZANU-PF or we will punish you the way we did comrades who were 'selling-out' during the liberation war).<sup>64</sup> Like many civilians in Zimbabwe, junior soldiers were denied the right to a free and secret vote. As a result, Charlie Mike stole away from the camp and sought refuge in South Africa.

Actually, when I was released, that's when I sneaked out of the camp. I had to run away and I came to South Africa. I couldn't live in fear. Ja, I had to come to South Africa because I was not a soldier for the ZANU-PF party. I am a soldier for the people of Zimbabwe.<sup>65</sup>

Desertion was a way to deal with issues of fear in the barracks, of being arrested and detained. While fear does not necessarily end with desertion, it was seen as a way of moving away from repressive structures within a hierarchy that demanded a particular brand of subordination.

#### *Whisky Papa and other deserters*

Whisky Papa has more military experience than the other deserters I interviewed. He was born in 1968 in Nkayi, a district in Matabeleland North, and joined the army in 1986. Immediately after basic military training, he was posted to Harare One Commando barracks for further training as a member of the Commando Special Forces. He was deployed in Mozambique from 1986 to 1992, the Angola peacekeeping mission in 1996, and the DRC war from 1998 to 2002. Having served in the army for twenty-one years and eight months, he was eligible for a pension, which accrues after twenty years of service. However, due to circumstances recounted below, he was demoted and then denied the opportunity to resign. Resigning from the Zimbabwe National Army is a tedious and frustrating process. Soldiers were persecuted more acutely once they lodged their intention to resign. The majority of my participants were left with no option other than deserting. Whisky Papa was punished on every parade and was labelled as an MDC sympathizer. In the end he felt

64. Interview, Bravo Lima, Johannesburg, 26 July 2012.

65. Interview, Charlie Mike, Johannesburg, 13 May 2012.

obligated to desert from the army, leaving his pension and other benefits. What is interesting in Whisky Papa's story is that he not only refers to his own experiences but to those of others as well: he uses 'we', meaning other soldiers. Whisky Papa identifies himself as a victim of politics in the army. His story is full of memories of persecution in the barracks.

His problems started during the DRC War when the troops were asked to vote in the Zimbabwe presidential elections. Whisky Papa remembers:

That was 2004, 2005, 2006. In 2006 I can say my problems began, they eventually led to my being here in South Africa today. Actually this is quite a sensitive and emotional issue. To start with, you know when the voting process came in Congo in 2002. Envelopes came, they were serialized 001, 003, and in each envelope there was your name. So you would be given an envelope '001'. So I remember when I told some junior military men in the trenches that gentlemen, gentlemen watch out here. These envelopes have got serial numbers watch out for what they are planning to do. It was so tricky; the commanders could easily see how you voted. When we got back home after that fraudulent vote because it was not secret, meaning that if you voted otherwise you would find yourself in prison. So you cannot say that there was any vote, (because) we were not expressing our wishes.<sup>66</sup>

The political disciplining of soldiers apparently began in the trenches in the DRC war. Soldiers were expected to vote under the watchful eye of their commanders, and each ballot paper was clearly linked to a specific soldier. While the dominant discourse in Zimbabwe perceived all soldiers as pro-ZANU-PF and pro-President Robert Mugabe, the excerpt above shows that soldiers like Whisky Papa wanted to vote for their own choice.

Soldiers like Whisky Papa interpreted such events as evidence of unprofessional military practices in the ZNA:

So when we came back we discovered that indeed the army had totally changed. It was now politics in the military. There was now indoctrination, a sort of brain washing, a sort of blinkering, and channelling of ideas to the extent that, at the end of it, when it got to around 2006, things were really bad in the military. We were now faced with this thing; forced politicization of the military. Starvation in terms of meals, and torn uniforms compared to the luxurious life styles of commanders.<sup>67</sup>

At this point it was also conditions in the barracks, as described by Whisky Papa, which forced *Mafikizolo* soldiers to leave the army. Their expectations of army life were not being fulfilled, and the ZNA had changed from being apolitical to being highly politicized, with soldiers being neglected and even harassed as a result of their views:

Ja, ja, morale went down, [there were] resignations now; it began with retirement, a retirement that comes not out of your own will but out of a situation where you see that something is no longer right here. And then there was this, as times went on, around 2007, these retirements they were banned. They were serving no retirements anymore. They were saying, you are now joining MDC and the forces of imperialism. Meaning that, if

66. Interview, Whisky Papa, Johannesburg, 20 August 2012.

67. *Ibid.*

you look at it I have worked . . . for the country and the constitution, but it does not make me a slave of anyone. The constitution does not say that I should *not* have my rights. We found ourselves now being told that you cannot leave the army. You want to go and join MDC, meaning that my life, my own life, my God-given life, was now being controlled by another man for his own benefit, against my freedom, against my will, making me a slave of him.<sup>68</sup>

When Whisky Papa was talking he became agitated. He understood that even soldiers should have their rights, as enshrined in the constitution. The right to leave the army should have been his personal choice, but that choice was not respected. This led some to frame desertion as a political necessity. According to Alpha Romeo:

I did not desert the army; I was forced to leave. A military man in the barracks is a man under confinement. He is a man who is not sure of his freedom. The moment you are forced by the army to conform to certain things, that compromises your manhood. The time I left the army, the army was no longer an army. You were forced to worship ZANU PF and President Robert Mugabe. ZANU-PF is the army and the army is ZANU-PF. On pay day you are forced to say, 'Thank you ZANU PF for paying me.'<sup>69</sup>

The use of the phrase 'compromising your manhood' reveals the sense of emasculation felt by these soldiers under siege from the implicit violence of barracks life.

The relationship between ZANU-PF and the military has remained political. According to Giuseppe Caforio's analysis of civil–military relations, the sole client of the military should be the state.<sup>70</sup> However, army generals in Zimbabwe depict the state as President Mugabe and ZANU-PF party. Furthermore, given that the promotion of senior officers is determined either directly or indirectly by the state,<sup>71</sup> these army generals relied upon ZANU-PF, and were submissive to President Mugabe's political control. Whisky Papa notes:

Politics had taken over the life of a soldier, because you had to denounce the MDC in front of war veterans in the army, so that you wouldn't get tortured. I was criminalized and displaced. I was turned into a refugee. From a military man I was made a refugee. I did not even have time to prepare; the only thing that I left with is my soul. You cannot work for twenty-one years and eight months and then simply desert the army. It only goes to show how bad the military had deteriorated.<sup>72</sup>

The excerpts above reveal the anger and frustration of soldiers who, on joining the Zimbabwean army, had never envisaged that they would be

68. *Ibid.*

69. Interview, Alpha Romeo, Johannesburg, 26 August 2012.

70. Giuseppe Caforio, 'Introduction: The interdisciplinary and cross-national character of social studies on the military – The need for such an approach', in Giuseppe Caforio (ed.), *Social sciences and the military: An interdisciplinary overview* (Routledge, London and New York, 2007), pp. 1–20.

71. John Allen Williams, 'Political science perspectives on the military and civil–military relations', in Caforio, *Social sciences and the military*, pp. 89–104.

72. Interview, Whisky Papa, Johannesburg, 20 August 2012.



persecuted. The extracts reveal what these soldiers expected in the military: prestige and honour. However, instead of enjoying these benefits they were turned into 'refugees'.

In some ways, we can imagine that the story of Whisky Papa is a synopsis of what the violence of the post-colonial African state can do to its citizens: 'making' its soldiers into refugees, fearful of their lives. As Achille Mbembe argues, 'the postcolony is also made up of a series of corporate institutions and a political machinery which, once they are in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence'.<sup>73</sup> We can thus understand the military as both an actor of and itself surrounded by a state of violence. It not only directs violence against ordinary citizens, but also takes aim at fellow soldiers.

It is clear from Whisky Papa's narrative that soldiers who wished to resign were thought to be MDC supporters. The ZNA did not want MDC loyalists within the barracks, but neither did it want them to leave the army. The normal processes according to which soldiers could resign were suspended. This was because the generals suspected that soldiers would join the MDC. There was concern about the mass resignation of soldiers from the army. The right to resign, as stipulated in the Defence Act, was no longer adhered to, and 'politics' intervened.

The problems faced by the *Mafikizolo* soldiers contrasted with the privileges received by the command structure, which greatly benefited from ZANU PF patronage. Whisky Papa emphasized that:

When I joined the military in 1986, I was told to be apolitical and to have nothing to do with politics – politics was a civilian matter. But unfortunately things turned the other way round. We have soldiers administratively discharged, just because a commander said I saw so and so soldier attending an MDC rally. A commander could come up with an idea of his own and then make it his word against a soldier and no witness was needed. As long as a commander who is totally loyal to ZANU-PF would say I saw (that) particular soldier, evidence was thrown out whether this one is right or not and you suffer the consequences.<sup>74</sup>

Whisky Papa alleges that soldiers' conversations in the barracks were censored, and that they were denied opportunities to comment on political issues in the country. Partisan soldiers also monitored other soldiers outside the barracks over the weekends, to see if they were supporting the MDC.

Whisky Papa's experience of censorship in the army barracks was similar to that of India Sierra, who was working in the Signals Corps. India Sierra emphasized that 'the shift commander was a war veteran and he didn't want me to work as an operator, he was always saying you are too

73. Achille Mbembe, 'Provisional notes on the postcolony', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62, 1, (1992), pp. 3–37, p. 3.

74. Interview, Whisky Papa, Johannesburg, 20 August 2012.

junior to know what is happening in the army, you will sell out.’<sup>75</sup> If a *Mafikizolo* soldier wished to be ‘safe’ he had to praise President Robert Mugabe and his party. This reveals how the army was fearful of soldiers’ support of the MDC. Because the MDC had a lot of support and was gaining a dominant position in politics, *Mafikizolo* soldiers were forced to praise ZANU PF and not to choose any alternative or embrace any other ‘truth’. For Whisky Papa:

You were no longer allowed to even read the private media newspaper; you were no longer allowed to put on a red cap. Anything that is red was not allowed. You had to hide anything that is red because the moment you are seen with anything that is red it was a problem. Red, ja, that’s the colour of the MDC.<sup>76</sup>

The red cap and red t-shirts are MDC regalia, used in public campaigns. Military intelligence was responsible for monitoring what soldiers were reading and which radio stations they listened to. Soldiers who were caught with anything red or reading ‘private media’ (not state-controlled) newspapers were detained and harassed. It is quite hard to believe how readily soldiers who were trained to be ‘warrior heroes’<sup>77</sup> became victims in the ZNA.<sup>78</sup>

In another example from 2002, two lieutenants from a battalion I knew were dismissed from the army when it was reported that they seemed ‘too happy’ in the Officers Mess when MDC’s victorious parliamentarians were announced by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. When a soldier wanted to read or listen to ‘opposition’ broadcasting, he had to do so surreptitiously. Radio stations such as Voice of America and Voice of the People were said to be anti-government. In addition, newspapers such as the *Daily News*, the *Standard* and *Financial Gazette* were forbidden material for soldiers inside and outside the barracks. Those with access to satellite dishes were not allowed to tune in to BBC, CNN, and News24 programmes. Such mainstream news sources were said to represent the views of the West and America, whose leaders were regarded as ZANU PF enemies. Soldiers were kept in the dark; they were not supposed to know how the MDC was progressing politically in the election campaigns. The only radio and television stations that were allowed in the barracks were government-controlled sources: the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation and Zimbabwe television. In addition, soldiers had to read only the state-controlled newspapers: the *Herald*, the *Chronicle* and other state provincial newspapers like *Mamica*

75. Interview, India Sierra, Johannesburg, 12 September 2012.

76. Interview, Whisky Papa, Johannesburg, 20 August 2012.

77. Rachel Woodward, ‘Warrior heroes and little green men: Soldiers, military training, and the construction of rural masculinities’, *Rural Sociology* 65, 4 (2000), pp. 640–57.

78. Cf. McGarry and Walklate, ‘The soldier as victim’.

*Post* and the *Masvingo Star*, which spearheaded the ZANU PF's 'patriotic history' and propaganda in the post-2000 crisis.<sup>79</sup>

Another feature of the politicization of the military was the increase of parades. Every morning company sergeant majors inspected their soldiers. On Mondays it was the main parade, inspected by the regimental sergeant major. At brigade level the brigade sergeant major was responsible for different inspection days. During all of these parades, soldiers experienced repression and constraints. On parades, the regimental sergeant major or company sergeant major would say: 'We have civilians in combat around us, those who support MDC.'<sup>80</sup> The notion of 'civilians in combat' is a metaphor used in the military to demean other soldiers. It is a label for those who were seen as not properly trained. In this case, those who were perceived as MDC supporters were viewed as civilians dressed in army uniforms. Gerald Mazarire explains that ZANLA guerrillas used parades as spaces of discipline to shame rogue comrades.<sup>81</sup> Soldiers who were found to have an undone button, to be unshaven, with messed-up army fatigues or unpolished patrol boots, were punished, for example, with two days' extra guard duty. The punishment was not fixed but rather was very subjective: some received minimal punishment, like ten press-ups, while some got harsh punishment, like digging a pit six feet deep in a day.

Parades were also used as spaces of political mobilization. In revealing the 'politicization of military parades', I draw on Rachel Woodward's idea of military landscapes as 'spaces of violence', such as the ways in which military activities damage and pollute the environment.<sup>82</sup> However, I see spaces of violence as referring to how the junior soldiers on political parades were indoctrinated and victimized by political commanders. One of the activities that became routine in the military was *toyi-toying* (the stamping of feet and spontaneous chanting of slogans and political songs) in the barracks and being drilled in a quick and then a slow march. Political indoctrination was public and un-questioned. ZANU PF slogans were openly chanted during parades. Slogans such as '*masoja pamberi nemusangano*' ('soldiers ahead with ZANU-PF') became everyday language enforced by the commanders on parades. Parades became sites where the MDC and its leader Morgan Tsvangirai were demeaned. Whisky Papa emphasized that:

I was falsely accused of being an MDC because I was absent for two days. They created a story about me. This brigadier incriminated me. I was arraigned before him and I was

79. Blessing-Miles Tendi, 'Patriotic history and public intellectuals critical of power', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, 2 (2008), pp. 379–96.

80. Interview, Bravo Mike, Johannesburg, 19 September 2012.

81. Mazarire, 'Discipline and punishment in ZANLA'.

82. Rachel Woodward, 'Military pastoral and the military sublime in British army training landscapes', in Ian Rotherham and Christine Handley (eds), *War and Peat* (Wildtrack Publishing, Sheffield, 2013), pp. 45–56.

dealt with unfairly by him. I was demoted from staff sergeant to corporal. That very day I was put on guard duties at the main gate from 2 am to 4 am. I wrote to the Directorate Legal Service (DLS) for the redress of the wrong, citing the corrupt element of the commander. The Major who assisted me was arrested and put behind bars for ten days. As for me, everyone could see that I was headed for prison. The Brigadier would do anything to ensure that he made my life very uncomfortable; I had no intention of deserting. I had challenged the brigadier.<sup>83</sup>

Whisky Papa was demoted in rank. From my experience in the army, an absence of two days does not warrant demotion. Instead, the charge (and punishment) involves a misdemeanour and usually involves extra guard duties. Because of the unfairness of the charge brought against him, Whisky Papa decided to resign. However, his decision to resign was turned down. He was always being punished by officers linked to the Brigadier, and he finally deserted. Whisky Papa asserts that:

I asked to go on leave, they denied me. They began putting me always under arrest. I was always being arrested. No, no, no I would be arrested by the Brigade Sergeant Major (BSM). I was always under arrest.<sup>84</sup>

When arrested in the barracks, soldiers were subjected to heavy punishment popularly known as *chitigu* in the Chishona language. Punishment was meant to 'correct' those who behaved in an undesirable manner. Typically, a soldier under arrest was ordered to roll and crawl on the muddy and watered ground. Other forms of punishment included denying requests to be transferred to battalions closer to their homes. Bravo Kilo requested a posting to 4 Brigade, which was closer to his rural area. His request was dismissed on political grounds. The administrative officer explained to him: 'You want to go and support your new MDC Member of Parliament.'<sup>85</sup>

These combinations of punishments, harassment, and politicization eventually broke the morale of many soldiers. As Whisky Papa describes:

The Brigadier gave the military police specific orders to arrest me upon sight. Before I left the country I told them (immediate commanders) that I would fight back. I used to tell the officers, gentlemen I am going but be careful, we are going to fight. I used to tell them that, no, I am not going to go and keep quiet. I am going to fight back because of what you have done to me. You have destroyed me. My life has been destroyed over politics, over a system that has gone haywire. So that's how things ended up and I ended up here.<sup>86</sup>

For Whisky Papa, politics in the barracks was central in his explanation of his victimization. He left the army a disappointed soldier.

83. Interview, Whisky Papa, Johannesburg, 20 August 2012.

84. *Ibid.*

85. Interview, Bravo Kilo, Johannesburg, 3 October 2012.

86. Interview, Whisky Papa, Johannesburg, 20 August 2012.

### *Conclusion*

The military is often viewed as an organization that ‘makes’ soldiers who follow every order to the letter. This is even more the case in Zimbabwe, where the military is regarded as a key prop of the ZANU PF regime. This article has revealed how army deserters challenged and resisted many of the orders they were given, in the context of the broader politicization of the ZNA. This was despite knowing they would face severe consequences: detention and demotion of rank. Their actions in effect delineated the contours of their understanding of the professional soldier. They objected, and justified their actions in terms of the constitution and the Defence Act. They did not accept that the army could interfere in their personal relations, and they fiercely protected their right to a private sphere. This has important consequences, which reveal key techniques of power that have propped up the post-colonial state in Zimbabwe.

In this article I have argued that the barracks can be conceptualized as a political enclosure in which soldiers were coerced to behave and act in a prescribed ‘patriotic’ manner. Routine activities were structured by politicized military discipline. The barracks became a containment zone for disciplining and punishing soldiers, especially suspected MDC supporters. As with politics among civilians, labels such as *mupanduki* (traitor) came to be commonly used for soldiers. The army continued to use the tactics of authority and violence deployed during the guerrilla war to punish and discipline *Mafikizolo* soldiers in the post-colonial army. These violent techniques and practices did not begin in 2000, but they became most extreme during the period of political crisis in Zimbabwe. The political crisis provoked practices of political victimization that targeted a particular generation of soldiers within the army. As seen in the testimony of those interviewed, when soldiers became political targets in the army barracks, they found it hard to continue serving and many chose to desert.

While the existing literature presents Zimbabwean army soldiers as perpetrators of political violence, this article shows the ways in which soldiers themselves were spied on, subjected to surveillance, and punished. All these practices were perceived as political in the army barracks, as soldiers were often forced to prop up President Robert Mugabe. Hence the army deserters whose stories are presented in this article reveal that the military institution is violent not only towards civilians, but also towards its own soldiers. The article also opens up a new avenue of research on African militaries, which is to understand why soldiers continue to desert in post-colonial Africa, especially in countries such as Uganda, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Eritrea, among others.