

## **Book review**

# ***A brutal state of affairs: The rise and fall of Rhodesia***

***Henrik Ellert and Dennis Anderson 2020***

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The story about the perpetrators of violence and its impact, associated with the political history of the territory of Southern Rhodesia, Rhodesia and Zimbabwe, remains incomplete. Four decades after the end of the War of Liberation (1966–1979), two participants, Dennis Malcolm Anderson and Henrik Ellert who (in 1956–1979 and 1964–1979, respectively) worked in the British South Africa Police's Criminal Investigation Department, the Special Branch, and later in the Combined Operations (COMOPS) structure, have joined forces to document their perspectives on the operational role and methods of 'white nationalism' executing brutal and 'violent power retention' operations. Their renditions have been combined and aligned up until their retirements in 1979 and into the early years of independent Zimbabwe from April 1980 (p. ix). The work therefore represents a combined 39 years' service and

exposition in the country's politico-military history, informed by intelligence operatives who occupied front row seats as they worked in the 'Ops Rooms' of 'Operation Hurricane' and 'Operation Thrasher', as well as manning the 'Terrorist Desk' in COMOPS until the end of the war. This experience, coupled with their unique, post-retirement ability to have access to key informants, such as Marda Fairlie, daughter of the late head of the Central Intelligence Organisation Ken Flower, who allowed them to use her notes from the 'archives that were not included in his book, *Serving Secretly*' (p. viii). The writers also used primary source materials from 'their own documents and notes' supplemented by 'original reports and documents' from the Special Branch, the Central Intelligence Organisation and the Directorate of Military Intelligence that survived destruction or hasty relocation to South Africa during the closing stages of the 1966–1979 war – which makes their contribution unique in many respects (pp. vii, viii). The work also benefited from diplomatic cable releases from foreign intelligence and embassies of South Africa, Belgium, France, Portugal, Malawi that were entrusted to senior police and intelligence institutions, and used in their engagement with the neighbouring Portuguese East Africa (now Mozambique) and the metropolises in Lisbon, Portugal, and Pretoria, South Africa (p. viii).

The work focuses on the use of violence for political purposes of power retention by a white minority regime, and suppression of the agitating majority of Africans in the country between 1966 until 1979. Organised in fifteen chapters, the evidence reveals that as early as 1975, Rhodesian capacity was significantly stretched to include minor Portuguese assistance as well as massive *apartheid* South Africa war material and personnel under that country's *Total National Strategy*, as described and discussed in Chapter 10 (pp. 235–304). To that end, the book has been written in the genre of David Alexander Robinson's 2006 thesis (University of Western Australia), *Curse on the land: A history of the Mozambican Civil War*, which was almost exclusively based on intelligence sources (p. 17).

Given the shroud of unexplained and vexing developments during the liberation war, the significance of this book is that it offers reasoned explanations, based on empirically verifiable evidence, and allows closure, decades later. This may be regarded as the greatest contribution made by the book on the way forward. To this end, two events amongst many have been selected for citation as examples.

The first valuable contribution is the explanation of the abduction and disappearance of the Publicity Secretary of Muzorewa's United African National Congress (UANAC), Edison Sithole, accompanied by Miriam Mhlanga, outside the Ambassador Hotel in the capital city, Salisbury (now Harare), on 15 October 1975 (p. 214). According to Ellert and Anderson, SB suspected that his true political allegiance was with the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), led by Robert Mugabe, and therefore made the decision 'to snatch and turn him' so that 'he provides invaluable source of intelligence if the right inducement was offered'. This was done by using the techniques of isolation, fear and compelling a broken individual to change loyalties and work for the 'system', and this procedure was enacted at the military Barracks at Inkomo, some forty kilometres from the capital (p. 213).

However, something went horribly wrong with that operation. When Edison Sithole and Miriam Mhlanga were abducted, unbeknown to the operatives, Brother Arthur Dupuis, the Organising Secretary of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia (CCJP), a known, outspoken and fearless critic of the Rhodesian government, witnessed the event. Br Arthur then held a press conference reporting the incident to journalists who filed reports citing the SB's involvement in Sithole's arrest. Next, as the evidence in the book continues, the CCJP hired a private investigator to ascertain the whereabouts of Sithole. In that endeavour, they were able to secure 'a signed declaration of facts' from an army corporal, Muradzike, serving with the Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR) based at Inkomo Barracks, who claimed to have seen Sithole in a confined area within the camp. In order to protect the 'evidence and informant', CCJP quickly flew Muradzike to Malawi as a hiding place. In an intriguing development, unbeknown to CCJP, however, there was a close working relationship between the Rhodesian and Malawian Special Branches. The former then contacted the latter, resulting in the early tracking down of Muradzike, who was then 'arrested as an illegal immigrant' and taken in for questioning. Muradzike was never to be seen again. Meanwhile, his accompanying private investigator was severely injured in the high speed deliberate ramming of his vehicle. He was hospitalised in the Queen Elizabeth Infirmary in Blantyre, and his vehicle was later found burnt out near the border to Mozambique. He disappeared, and the evidence was successfully erased. The details are only now emerging in this book (pp. 214–215).

The next empirical revelation followed the events leading to the massacre of missionaries at the Elim Pentecostal Mission on the border with Mozambique in Inyanga North near the town of Umtali on 23 June 1978. Connecting the dots on this event only comes from the painstaking evaluation of the facts as has been the methodological presentation and hallmark of this book.

The events begin with the acknowledgement of the deterioration of the security situation in the area bordering Mozambique in which the school was located. The Elim International Missions Board therefore decided to either close the school or relocate it from the Katerere Mission to the vacated Eagle School in the Vumba Mountains, nearer the Umtali town. To effect this, Board Member Peter Griffiths flew out from the UK to consult. Acting 'against repeated advice and warnings from the police', it was decided to relocate the Katerere mission school to the recently vacated Eagle School (p. 228). Whilst at the new location, a further chilling warning was delivered to the Principal, Phil Evans, on 20 June 1978, calling on all whites to vacate and leave. This was just three days before a brutal attack was launched in which 'twelve Europeans and four babies were killed' (pp. 228–230).

The Elim Pentecostal Mission attack drew widespread local and international concern amidst speculation about who had done it. According to this study, 'Robert Mugabe denied involvement of ZANLA forces while accusing the Rhodesian Special Forces of carrying out the killings' (p. 230).

Some eight weeks later, however, a police patrol clashed with a dozen ZANLA guerrillas, and two of the guerrillas were killed. Section Officer Poole conducted a search of the bodies and discovered a diary listing:

ambush on civilians – where weapons used axes and knobkerries. Aim to destroy the enemies. We killed 12 whites including four babies as remembrance of Nyadzonya, Chimoi, Tembeu and in Zimbabwe massacres (p. 230).

However, long after the event, in 1980 when the integration of former combatants into the new national army was in progress, and some of them were accommodated at the Bulawayo, Entumbane camp, members of the same group who had participated in the Elim Mission event revealed that:

one night they collectively experienced a vision in which they saw the Cross and the hand of God rising against them in judgement (p. 230).

All of them immediately abandoned their military careers, turning pacifist, with seven leaving the country to enrol in Bible colleges, in West and East Africa. Significantly, the eighth man, Garikai, whose war name was Devil Hondo, later, in unexplained circumstances, met up with and confessed to Stephen Griffiths, whose father Peter had been the leading Board Member to visit the country in 1978 and associated with the tragic decisions taken. Garikai explained that he and his group had killed the missionaries and the four babies' using axes and knobkerries in order not to attract the attention of a possible reaction unit from nearby Umtali. Stephen Griffiths published the striking confession in a book, *The Axe and the Tree* (Griffiths 2017. Oxford, Monarch Books). (See also: Yagil Henkin 2012. *Stoning the dogs: Guerrilla mobilization and violence in Rhodesia*. Unpublished thesis, Israeli Defence Forces, Command and Staff College. pp. 2, 12.)

What makes this book significant and a must read is that, at the end of the 'brutal state of affairs: ...and fall of Rhodesia' in 1980, the leading political actors did not provide an opportunity for addressing transitional justice, restitution and reconciliation. This unfortunate trend has continued where state-sponsored atrocities have occurred in independent Zimbabwe—establishing the undesirable phenomenon that transgressions are simply glossed over without adequate restorative justice. This book, based on meticulous empirical research spanning the period 1966 to the 1980s, therefore provides a platform for undertaking such action. Presenting governance lessons for public officials, it is a must have for civil society and libraries.