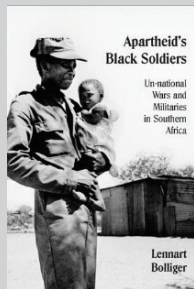


# Resilience in uniform: A review of Apartheid's black military contribution

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Apartheid's Black Soldiers:  
Un-National Wars and  
Militaries in Southern Africa

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Lennart Bolliger

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Resilience in uniform: A  
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military contribution

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Lennart Bolliger's *'Apartheid's Black Soldiers: Un-National Wars and Militaries in Southern Africa'* is an exquisite narration of tragedy, an eye-opening exploration into South Africa's liberation and military history and its neglected role players. While the black and white book cover conveys a feeling of nostalgia and mystery, the content ironically shows us the lesser-explored grey areas of South Africa's past. There is an elegance and simplicity in the image depicted on the cover. The choice of imagery and the absence of colour intensify its emotional impact and hint at a deeper, uneasy, and conflicting backstory. While the image of a shack hints at an unequal society in Apartheid and democratic South Africa, the image of a soldier embracing a child symbolises many realities embedded in South Africa's problematic past.

Bolliger delves deep into the roles of black soldiers from South Africa and neighbouring countries in their fight for and against the Apartheid government. Highlighting uncomfortable truths, *'Apartheid's Black Soldiers: Un-National Wars and Militaries in Southern Africa'* skilfully articulates the Apartheid's soldiers' experiences in a manner that evokes sympathy, controversy and understanding. In contrast to the book cover, the soldiers' experiences accentuated a wrestle with a complex system of oppression for equality in a socio-economically divided society.

In addition to oral accounts, the book uses archival sources to accurately narrate the accounts of soldiers and their work's personal impact on their relationships with their families and communities while limiting personal bias from the writer. By expanding on military cultures and perceptions of masculinity, the author encourages the reader to think beyond the wars and see how the soldiers' sociological and political experiences informed their actions. Furthermore, the book provides a human perspective by delving deeply into the soldiers' military contributions and personal stories, allowing the reader to be more compassionate. The discourse on black soldiers' experiences and military contributions alongside the Apartheid government requires extensive research. Their contributions are too often shied away, resulting in hostile attitudes towards those perceived as 'traitors' and even more hostile environments for them to tell their stories. This book serves as a platform to narrate the soldiers' experiences, sacrifices, conflicts, and their motivation to keep fighting.

It is evident in Bolliger's writing that the research was collected meticulously, and his empathetic storytelling permits the reader to relate to the soldiers' stories on a deeper level, allowing them to be seen as more than 'traitors' in a deeply divided and unjust society. By intertwining historical context and personal stories, Bolliger brilliantly conveys an unfortunate reality of soldiers who had to be resilient in the face of multiple challenges, fighting for country and self while resisting oppression. The author also portrays an environment where the black soldiers occasionally had to align with the enemy of their enemy to defeat what they perceived to be the greater evil. The book discourages readers from analysing the soldiers' actions through a transnational theory. Bolliger states that the assumption that people living within the same borders share common goals, interests and ideologies unfairly creates an expectation of loyalty and limits the ability to investigate their motivations.

While the book focuses on stories of black soldiers, Bolliger also encourages us to examine how Apartheid impacted society. He refers to white soldiers' different experiences with integrating into and navigating through a post-Apartheid society versus their black counterparts, acutely mentioning the difficulties black soldiers had with being welcomed back into their communities. Furthermore, the book highlights the long-term effects of exposure to war and the toxic masculinity embedded in military culture on the soldiers.

In addition, the author provides a broader understanding of how issues of race, loyalty, culture and power intersect in societies and, more specifically, in deeply unfair political systems.

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Bolliger makes content, which is otherwise uneasy to digest, palatable by shedding light on South Africa's overlooked past and introducing a human element.

The book serves as a historical document and acknowledges the individuals who fought for freedom, dignity and equality while battling the public's perceptions towards them. For those interested in South Africa's past, this book is an

educational tool to learn about the forgotten role-players and delve deeper into the complexities of Apartheid. For those not well-versed in South Africa's political history, the book will encourage understanding the impact of Apartheid. Whichever side you're coming from, this book will serve as a reminder that people perceive the fight towards emancipation through different lenses; while we may not always be on the same side, all stories deserve to be told.