Shadow Cultures, Shadow Histories
Foreign Military Personnel in Africa
1960–1980

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Abstract

From the 1960s to the 1980s mercenary soldiers in Africa captured the attention of journalists, authors and scholars. This thesis critically examines the shadows of mercenarism in sub-Saharan Africa during decolonisation – an intense period of political volatility, fragility and violence. The shadows of conflict are spaces fuelled by forces of power where defined boundaries of illegal/legal, illicit/licit and legitimate/illegitimate become obscured. Nordstrom (2000, 2001, 2004, 2007) invokes the shadows as a substantive ethnographic and analytical concept in anthropological research. This thesis considers how the shadows are culturally, socially and politically contingent spaces where concepts of mercenarism are contested. Specific attention is given to ‘shadow agents’ – former foreign military combatants, diplomats and politicians – whose lived experiences shed light on the power, ambiguities and uncertainties of the shadows. Arguing the importance of mixed method ethnography, this thesis incorporates three bodies of anthropological knowledge. Material from the official state archives of New Zealand and the United Kingdom (UK) where, amongst themselves, politicians and diplomats debated the ‘mercenary problem’, are used alongside oral testimonies from former foreign soldiers whose individual stories provide important narratives omitted from official records. This ethnography also draws on multi-sited fieldwork, including participant observation in Africa, the UK and New Zealand that engages with and captures the more intimate details of mercenary soldiering. As findings suggest, the worlds of diplomacy, politics and mercenarism are composed of shadow cultures where new perspectives and understandings emerge.
Acknowledgements

I cannot overstate my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Greg Rawlings. I am indebted to his dedication, time and support over the duration of this research. Greg, your enthusiasm, academic excellence, passion for anthropology and kindness have been invaluable, not just to this project, but to me personally. Both inside and outside the academic arenas I have learnt so much from you. What has truly made this research so enjoyable is the way you supported me with patience and compassion while also encouraging and stimulating my own thought processes and ideas. Above all else, you believed in me. I could not have wished for a better supervisor and friend. Greg, you are an inspiration.

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To Mum and Dad. Your love, support and care have been the most important aspect of my journey through university. What this means to me cannot be justly captured in words. You have always been there for me, especially when I have needed you most. You are my rock.

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Finally, to my partner Amelia. It is your unyielding love, support, positivity, and calming presence that reminds me why I am the luckiest person I know.
Notes on Referencing

This thesis incorporates two specific referencing styles. For secondary sources, the Harvard system of referencing is employed. Since this thesis includes substantial volumes of archival material, the Chicago referencing style is also used. This means footnotes provide citations and references to primary sources including a wide range of official government records, archived newspaper articles, legislation, and multilateral resolutions and conventions. Footnotes are also used throughout this thesis as explanatory notes for readers. It is challenging to include the intricacies of archival references within the Harvard system, especially where repositories vary between countries. This system of combining both referencing styles is an established method in ethnohistory and is used in journals like History and Anthropology. See also Scofield (2011) for recent uses of this referencing system.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress (South Africa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAPSC</td>
<td>British Association of Private Security Companies</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSAP</td>
<td>British South African Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSAC</td>
<td>British South African Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNA</td>
<td>British National Archives</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency (United States)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPI</td>
<td>Department of Information (United Nations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EO</td>
<td>Executive Outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>Foreign and Commonwealth Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>FNLA</td>
<td>National Liberation Front of Angola (<em>Frente Nacional de Liberatacao de Angola</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>Foreign Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRELIMO</td>
<td>Liberation Front of Mozambique (<em>Frente de Libertacao de Mozambique</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPLA</td>
<td>The Peoples Movement for the Liberation of Angola (<em>Movimento Popular de Liberatacao de Angola</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs (New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFAT</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO/s</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organisation of African Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OE</td>
<td>Overseas Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONUC</td>
<td>United Nations Operation in the Congo (<em>Opération des Nations unies au Congo</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPDO</td>
<td>Overseas Policy and Defence (Official) Committee (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMC</td>
<td>Private Military Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Private Security Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RENAMO</td>
<td>The Mozambican National Resistance (<em>Resistência Nacional Moçambicana</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>RLI</td>
<td>Rhodesian Light Infantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNZAF</td>
<td>Royal New Zealand Air Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>SADF</td>
<td>South African Defence Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>Special Air Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWAPO</td>
<td>South West Africa People’s Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAR</td>
<td>United Arab Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDI</td>
<td>Unilateral Declaration of Independence</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNITA</td>
<td>The National Union for Total Independence of Angola <em>(Uniãão Nacional para a Independêêcia Total de Angola)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZANLA</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZANU</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African National Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZIPRA</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Peoples Revolutionary Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZAPU</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African Peoples Union</td>
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Introduction

It is mid March 2010, and I have just taken a seat at a relaxed beachside bar in a small West African village in Ghana. The afternoon is hot and humid. I am grateful for the Okorye tree growing next to the wooden deck as it shades me from the heavy equatorial sun. The light sea breeze, which I am also very grateful for, only just takes the edge off the stifling heat. As I lounge back in my seat, enjoying the dance provoking polyrhythmic beats of the latest African-Calypso music, coming from the bar’s dated stereo system, my recently acquired German friend “Ekka” and another man, I have not yet met, join me. Ekka, who I met at the same bar two days earlier, introduces me to his long-time friend “Michou” who has travelled to Ghana from his home in Abidjan, the capital of neighbouring Côte D’Ivoire (Ivory Coast). In Ghana I was working as a volunteer for a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) establishing eco-tourism and water safety programmes amongst the local community of Busua, a small beachside village on the country’s southern coast. What also led me to Ghana were the wider political challenges West Africa faces from the devastation caused by surrounding civil and cross-border conflicts. I was conscious and troubled by the violence that has plagued the region in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Côte D’Ivoire.

Like many other young African men in their late-20s Michou, who I had only just met at the beach bar in Busua, still dreamt of one day playing professional football. As we were discussing the week’s European football results, Ekka takes a mouthful of cold beer and starts explaining to Michou that I am from New Zealand and have a fascination in the topic of mercenary soldiering in Africa and its political implications. Our conversation then moves from European football matches to the political history of West Africa (in particular Côte D’Ivoire politics) and the involvement of Liberian and other foreign mercenaries in Africa’s more contemporary
conflicts in Sierra Leone, Angola and Côte D’Ivoire. Amongst ourselves we start exploring the term mercenary, discussing ideas of who and what falls under the definition of a ‘mercenary.’ In his heavily accented English, Michou starts explaining his personal experiences of conflict and mercenaries in Côte D’Ivoire. He tells me that the rebel forces in the North of the country, which are fighting against the government forces in the South, recruit young unemployed Liberian men from the border regions. They are paid to fight in “piles of gold and jewels” (Interview, Busua, Ghana, April 2010). He also explained that the rebels, instead of employing large numbers of highly trained soldiers from western countries who were “expensive” to hire, pay for five “whitemen” soldiers to train their militia. On a more personal level Michou went on to tell us about his best friend who switched allegiances from the government forces to the rebels in the north of Côte D’Ivoire, as he was offered more money to fight. According to Michou his friend needed the money to help his two children go to school and buy a family home. Sadly, he explains that he has not heard from this friend in two years and no longer knows where he is. As our discussion of mercenaries in Côte D’Ivoire gradually changes back to football, Ekka takes this as his cue to get us another round of cold beers. Michou and I watch the clusters of dark grey and purple storm clouds gather on the horizon.

Transient people like Ekka and Michou were not uncommon in the small Ghanaian village of Busua. Its idyllic beach side setting looking out over the Atlantic and its rolling surf, coupled with a basic tourism infrastructure, makes the village a popular destination for travellers and foreigners living or working in other parts of Africa wanting to relax and recuperate from what ever strenuous activities they may have been involved in.

Conversations about mercenaries continued with a group of United States (US) marines who were on two days leave from their 50-day deployment elsewhere in West Africa. I met them at the same local bar on the beachfront. They shared their opinions and insightful stories of more contemporary “mercenaries.” These are private military personnel who are employed by (multinational) Private Security Companies (PSCs), operating in conflict zones worldwide; the more publicised countries being Afghanistan and Iraq. One of the marines, a medic who had completed eight years active service, told me about other US military personnel he served alongside in Afghanistan and Iraq who were now hired by one of the largest PSCs in America. His disapproval of PSCs was clear – “Too many fucking cowboys”
he told me (Interview Busua, Ghana, April 2010). These were opinions he formed from encounters with private military contractors while on deployment in Iraq as a young marine back in 2004 and 2005. Yet the lure of a salary twice what he was currently earning was the reason one of the other marines I was talking to was “going private” once he had finished his seventh and final deployment with the US navy.

Encounters with people like Ekka, Michou and the US marines fuelled my fascination in the phenomenon of mercenary soldiering. The volatility of the region was reaffirmed only a matter of months after I had departed Ghana. In May 2010, neighbouring Côte D’Ivoire broke out in civil unrest leading into their presidential elections. In late 2010, former President Laurent Gbagbo refused to hand over power to the new democratically elected candidate, Alassane Ouattara. Armed forces loyal to each of the leaders clashed violently in Abidjan. The country descended into four and half months of civil war. According to the United Nations (UN), “considerable evidence” revealed that Gbagbo’s government had used some 4,500 Liberian mercenaries in a desperate effort to cling to power (United Nations Human Rights 2011). The conflict finally ended when pro-Ouattara forces, backed by members of the international community including the UN, arrested Gbagbo at his palace in Abidjan.¹

However, it was an undergraduate research project exploring mercenaries, petrodollars and the history of coup d’etat in Equatorial Guinea, West Africa that initially compelled me to pursue the topic. I had at first wanted to conduct an ethnographic study of mercenary soldiers by focusing on the 7 March 2004 failed Equatorial Guinea coup plot, where a force of 69 mercenaries led by former British SAS officer Simon Mann tried to overthrow President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. The mercenaries were arrested in Harare by Zimbabwean security authorities when their Boeing-727 plane landed en route to the country’s capital, Malabo. The plane was about to be loaded with £100,000 worth of weapons and military equipment. As stories of this brazen attempt to violently overthrow an African dictator, as a way of gaining access to the country’s vast oil reserves, surfaced in the international media, they began revealing an intricate web of people, money, governments, and mercenaries that had been operating in hidden spaces away from

¹ Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimates that 3,000 people were killed and 150 women raped during the conflict period from January to April 2011, “often in targeted acts perpetrated along political, ethnic and religious lines” (Human Rights Watch 2011). Both the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimate that the numbers of civilians displaced by the conflicts range in the hundreds of thousands.
public scrutiny. For me, this episode resonated with Carolyn Nordstrom’s (2004, p. 106) ethnography of the “shadows of war,” where “complex sets of cross-state economic and political linkages… move outside formally recognised state-based channels.”

The more I conducted research into this dramatic series of events in Equatorial Guinea, Zimbabwe and South Africa the more I was intrigued by them. However, it also stimulated my interest in the phenomenon of mercenarism on a wider level, compelling me to ask questions about the roles private soldiers and armies play in various forms of conflict and their historical origins. My deep concern for the adverse effects violence has on peoples lives, coupled with a pre-existing fascination in Africa and mercenarism, meant I was eager to conduct research in these areas. Yet, contemporary political instability in Africa, conflict and the involvement of PSCs, cannot be studied in isolation from the recent past. They have not occurred in an historical vacuum. As I embarked on this research it became apparent that more recent mercenary activities (such as Equatorial Guinea) and the rise and presence of contemporary neo-liberal Private Military Companies (PMCs)\(^2\) in fragile African states have their origins in conflicts that erupted over the continent decades earlier (see Musah & Fayemi 2000).

**Histories and Presents: Mercenary soldiering, current wars and past conflicts**

As I began to formulate ideas for this thesis in mid-2010, I realised I would need to narrow the scope of the research due to the breadth of trends, themes and evidence. This meant approaching it in one of two ways. First, was to examine the contemporary involvement of corporate militaries in Africa (PMCs and PSCs). The

\(^2\) Many commentators and scholars use the terms PSC and PMC interchangeably. However, there is ongoing debate that suggests there are conceptual differences between them. PMCs are sometimes perceived as providing more active security services, identifiable in corporate armies such as Sandline or Executive Outcomes. These military organisations provided highly trained military personnel for combative operations, often blurring the boundaries between illegal and legal military practises. Both companies are now defunct but were previously active in parts of Africa and elsewhere in the world during the late 1990s and early 2000s. PSCs, on the other hand, are regarded as legitimate providers of more regular security services such as intelligence and logistical support for military operations. PSCs work within sectors of oil and gas; governments; major corporates; retail; leisure and tourism; transport; energy and utilities; and financial institutions. See Tonkin (2011, pp. 34-35); Singer (2008, pp. 89-91); Chesterman & Lehnardt (2007, p. 3); Brooks (2001, pp. 129-130); and Shearer (1998, p. 24) for further discussion on the debates surrounding classifications of PSCs and PMCs.
second was more historically located research that focused on the intervention of
foreign mercenaries in the conflicts that broke out during decolonisation in the late
20th century. When I realised I needed to give attention to the history of mercenaries
in Africa in order to study contemporary PSCs I discovered that it was a vast and
valid topic in its own right. Having arrived back in London, United Kingdom (UK) in
late May 2010 after my four months of voluntary work in West Africa, I decided to
investigate the British National Archives (BNA) (formerly the Public Records Office
[PRO]) in Kew for material on mercenaries. Once inside the archive I discovered a
plethora of recently released official documents pertaining to mercenaries and their

This large volume of primary material was full of rich ethnohistorical material, stories and narratives.

The recent history of Africa includes some of the most documented cases of
mercenary activity in the 20th Century. In a messy entanglement of Cold War politics,
African decolonisation and struggles over white minority rule during the 1960s, 1970s
and 1980s, conflicts spread across the continent during this period. The majority of
these wars were fought in sub-Saharan Africa. The most notable, were in the Congo,
Nigeria, Angola, Mozambique, South West Africa (Namibia) and Rhodesia
(Zimbabwe). This period saw a sharp growth in the ‘illicit’ recruitment and
development of mercenary soldiers, where men from ‘western’ industrialised
countries were actively recruited and volunteered to fight in Africa’s sub-Saharan
conflicts.

Foreign soldiers arrived in the continent between 1960 and 1962 when they
were employed to help fight in the secession of Katanga, a province trying to break
away from the recently independent Congo. In 1964 foreign mercenaries returned to
the politically fragile Congo, this time to fight alongside government forces to
suppress an armed insurrectionist group called the Simbas. Their operations also
included helping rescue close to 2,000 civilians (mainly European settlers and

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3 In most Commonwealth countries, archives are released for open access after 30 years (see Valge &
Kibal 2007). The majority of previously restricted files I accessed at the British National Archives in
Kew had only just been released because of the 30-year limit.

4 Mercenaries that were active in Africa during this period were mostly all men. No records refer to
women mercenaries but that does not preclude them from having participated in these conflicts. For
photographic evidence of the possible participation of women as mercenaries in Africa in 1961 see

5 This does not discount the participation of indigenous African mercenaries over the period. My focus
is on the recruitment, deployment and participation of soldiers from “western” countries who
symbolised European and American interference in African conflicts. Many of those Africans who
were involved as ‘mercenaries’ were recruited or conscripted into military service (see Grundy 1983).
missionaries) from civil conflict (Geraghty 2007). When civil war was fought in Nigeria, between mid 1967 and early 1970, both the Nigerian federal government and the armed forces fighting for the secessionist region of Biafra employed foreign (primarily European) mercenaries. After a period of relative quiet in mercenary activity in the continent, foreign soldiers made a dramatic re-entry to the continent when they intervened in the Angolan civil war between 1975 and 1976. Foreign combatants were also present during the Rhodesian civil war in the late 1970s. These soldiers tended to dispute and contest the very term ‘mercenary,’ even if foreign governments and media outlets classified them as such. Men from Britain and other ‘white’ Commonwealth countries were recruited into the armed forces of the white minority government led by Prime Minister Ian Smith (1919–2007). As the Rhodesian civil war started coming to an end in 1979, South Africa began recruiting foreigners into its army. Since Rhodesia and South Africa were involved in conflicts on multiple fronts in the 1970s, those foreign soldiers who served in these armies were deployed to Mozambique, Angola, South West Africa and Zambia.

The presence and activities of mercenaries in African conflicts over this period has been well publicised in popular books (see Mockler 1987; Tickler 1987; Rogers 1998), magazines (Soldier of Fortune), novels (Fredrick Forsyth’s 1974, Dogs of War), movies (Andrew Mclaglen’s 1978 The Wild Geese, starring Roger Moore) and journalism which inform, influence and inflect public opinion and response to this phenomena. Many of these accounts explain events in great detail. This thesis sheds new light on the political context of these military activities, engaging with the deeper layers of complexity and meanings surrounding the politics, diplomacy and regulation of foreign soldiering in Africa. Narratives from archives and oral testimonies (gained through fieldwork) together with participant observation invoke lived experiences, human agency and wider political processes. Importantly, these bodies of knowledge open the way for a more critical assessment of this phenomenon.

During research at the National Archives in Kew, it became clear that the British government was concerned with the ‘mercenary problem’ in Africa, but did not know how to regulate these ‘private’ combatants who seemed to exploit ambiguous jurisdictional spaces that challenged the power of the state. Between 1960

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6 The Rhodesian civil war was a conflict between the white minority government and the black nationalist majority that raged from 1972-1979. It resulted in the eventual independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 (Preston 2004a). This civil war is also commonly known as the Rhodesian bush war or Second Chimurenga War. Throughout this thesis these terms are used interchangeably.
and 1980 mercenaries became a site of political and diplomatic uncertainty for the British government. Other Commonwealth countries were drawn into Africa’s mercenary problem because of the participation of their citizens in these conflicts. New Zealand was one of the countries that featured in numerous British documents. This research concentrates on both British and New Zealand perspectives on mercenarism and weaves them throughout this thesis.

Having uncovered 3060 pages of official documents from 66 files in the British National Archives (BNA), which included official and personal correspondence, intelligence reports, minutes, memos, and diplomatic cables, I returned to New Zealand. I carried out research in New Zealand’s National Archives in Wellington on the chance there would be documents relating to mercenaries in Africa during decolonisation. The majority of archived documents directly relevant to this thesis were held in restricted files. With the assistance of government officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) I was given a security clearance and granted access to these records. In the New Zealand National Archives I collated another 1480 pages of official documents from 35 files.

Following research at the BNA in Kew and Archives New Zealand in Wellington, I expected that a large number of mercenaries who fought in Africa’s conflicts in the 1960s and 1970s would still be alive today and potentially living in New Zealand. I began making enquiries into the possibility of interviewing former freelance military personnel who had participated in Africa’s conflicts in this era. Having made contact with an organisation of veteran soldiers who fought in Africa during this period I was invited to attend their annual reunion that was held in New Zealand in late 2010. Here I was able to carry out participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork. While there I was introduced to a network of former private combatants, who were predominantly New Zealand citizens and were willing to speak to me about their experiences. This led to a series of semi-structured interviews with ten men between the ages of 60 and 75 years who had travelled to Africa between 1960 and 1980, and fought in conflicts that included the Congo, Angola, Mozambique, South West Africa (Namibia) and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Their ethnographic

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7 Not all archives are available for public release after the 30-years limit expires. Government’s can continue to restrict files for a further 10 to 20 years, or even indefinitely if they concern sensitive matters. These can be waived on a case-by-case basis. Information on the security classification of archives is provided on the British National Archives website. See for example, “Security Classification of Information,” http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=Security_Classification_of_Information, 2010.
testimonies complemented the rich historical knowledge from the archives. With the exception of a few research participants, most of the interviewees viewed themselves as professional career driven soldiers not mercenaries. This created an obvious discrepancy between official classifications and categorisations of mercenaries and foreign soldiers who saw themselves as legitimate members of various armed forces.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the recruitment, deployment and attempts to regulate foreign military personnel in Africa over the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s from an anthropological perspective including the ethnographic interpretation of primary source historical documents. Due to the historical character of the research topic I have conducted this ethnography in three distinctive but intersecting spaces of anthropological knowledge: archives, oral histories and participant observation. This takes the form of what Gupta and Ferguson (1997, p. 37) advocate as a multistranded methodology that “cares about, and pays attention to, the interlocking of multiple social-political sites and locations.” Over the last 20 years increasing numbers of anthropologists have continued the dialogue between anthropology and history by attending to primary material in archives as rich and vibrant sources of ethnographic knowledge (Dirks 1992, 1993, 2002; Des Chene 1997; Stoler 2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2009; Kaplan 2002; Gleach 2005; Kan 2006; Rawlings 2011; Trundle 2011b; Trundle & Kaplonski 2011). While most of the thesis combines narratives from official archives and veteran soldier testimonies, these two perspectives are separated in chapters four and five, paying equal attention to them in an effort to provide epistemological parity between these methods of enquiry.

**Thesis Overview**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter two introduces and explores the theoretical and methodological frameworks of this research. As the overarching theme guiding this thesis, the chapter first attends to the analytical significance of Nordstrom’s (2004) conceptual metaphor of the “shadows.” Due to the ethnohistorical nature of this thesis, parts of Nordstrom’s (2004) work have been extended, reconceptualised and interpreted across other theoretical and empirical domains. The chapter then turns attention to the methods used to investigate the shadows of mercenary soldiering in Africa between the 1960s and 1980s. The methodology is a
triangulation of three bodies of anthropological knowledge. By exploring the importance of each source (archives, oral testimonies and participant observation), as a site of information in its own right, I seek to examine the growing dialogue between anthropology and history. Informed by Gupta and Ferguson (1997), I too advocate for the importance of 'multistranded' ethnographies that forge links between different bodies of knowledge.

To contextualise this research, chapter three is divided into two overall parts. Part one provides an historical overview of mercenarism. This overview shows a transition from the normative and legitimate recruitment of mercenaries to the nation-state’s use of standing citizen armies. It was during this transition that mercenarism came to be classified as an illicit, illegitimate, and in some cases, illegal practise. However, the relationship between states and mercenaries has remained ambiguous. Part two of chapter three thematically investigates sub-Saharan Africa’s conflicts between the 1960s and 1980s as politically charged theatres of war where the foreign soldiers pertinent to this research were actively serving. These conflicts are analysed not as mutually exclusive and isolated cases but instead as violent struggles that were interconnected.

Chapter four addresses the international condemnation of mercenarism that surfaced during the 1970s in direct response to the adverse effects foreign mercenaries had on increasing violence and their active contribution to instability on the continent. This resulted in multilateral regulatory efforts by the UN and Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The UN and OAU attempted to officially classify and define mercenarism providing templates to encourage national governments to pass their own legislation to criminalise and control mercenary practises. Yet official classifications are highly disputed. Rather than objective, universal and rigid, as codified in UN and OAU resolutions, definitions of mercenarism continue to be based on contested realities of warfare and remain politically, socially and culturally contingent. At this point I take the official UN definition of mercenarism, in Protocol I additional to the UN Geneva Conventions of 1949 Article 47 to discuss the ways in which private combatants who fought in Africa continue to exploit its shadowed and ambiguous spaces and reject being labelled as ‘mercenaries.’ The definitional borders of mercenarism are flexible, porous and steeped in ambiguity. This made regulation for the British and New Zealand governments a difficult and formidable task.
The purpose of Chapter five is to examine official British and New Zealand perspectives and responses to mercenary events as they unfolded in Africa. Drawing on archived documents as primary locations for ethnographic insight, this chapter explores the way state officials resorted to the shadowed spaces of government to discuss and debate the mercenary problem and in doing so articulated and asserted different forms of power. For government officials in London and Wellington mercenaries embodied a type of disorder and ambiguity that provoked, at different stages, varying levels of anxiety. Deficient anti-mercenary legislation, international political pressure and concerted efforts to protect national interests made the state’s control over those citizens leaving Britain, New Zealand and other parts of the Commonwealth to fight in Africa an exceedingly difficult task. As this chapter discusses, government officials were consumed in the legal aspects of regulation and because of this they infrequently assessed other political, social and cultural forces that were at play. Instead of being sites of control and order, official records pertaining to mercenaries in Africa reveal that the processes of state power are, to varying extents, irregular and disordered – inhibiting attempts at regulation. This thesis is about the contested definitions and practises of what is a ‘mercenary’ as debated in the shadows of politics, diplomacy and war.
It is mid October 2010, and I have successfully navigated my way to the home of a former private soldier I am about to interview. His house is located in the outskirts of a small New Zealand city where urban streets give way to rural landscapes. Cautiously I begin to walk down a long and well-used gravel driveway, lined either side by evergreen trees. While listening to the crunch of gravel under my shoes I admire the mid-morning dew as it glistens like a sea of diamonds over the neighbouring field of grass. Sheep with their newborn lambs languidly graze the luscious green pastures. Fast approaching an oncoming bend in the driveway I ease the pace of my walk so I can relish the benign warmth of the spring sun. The pleasures of this semi-rural locale are suddenly forgotten as the house comes into view. Having anticipated my arrival the ex-freelance soldier has spotted my approach from the impressively large lounge room windows that stand guard over the final stretch of driveway. In a matter of seconds he has opened the front door and made his way down a set of concrete stairs. With an enthusiastic and welcoming smile – the same as I remember from meeting him at the veteran soldier’s reunion two days earlier – he calls out, “Ah Will, you made it alright. No trouble getting here then?” We shake hands and he jokingly insists how it “must have been that skilled map drawing of mine, aye!” His comfortable appearance and relaxed demeanour has a disarming effect on my apprehension and nervousness about the interview. Welcoming me in, we climb the concrete stairs up to the front door and he cheerfully ushers me inside his family home.

The interviewee is a New Zealand citizen who once travelled to Southern Africa where he joined the Rhodesian army and fought against Zimbabwe African
National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe Peoples Revolution Army (ZIPRA) guerrilla forces at the height of the bush war. African conflicts, such as the one this man fought in just over 30 years ago, have largely been hidden in the “shadows” of recent history. The process of accessing stories of foreign soldiers who fought in Africa thus involves reconceptualising the shadows of past wars. Nordstrom’s (2004) approach to the shadows have a particular relevance to contemporary conflicts, but this same concept is applicable when interpreting the subject-positions that people recall when discussing wars that occurred many decades ago. This facilitates extended understandings of war’s shadows from the turbulence of decolonisation in Africa through to a post-colonial epoch.

(Re)Conceptualising the Shadows

Set in the throws of contemporary conflict in Africa, and focused on intricate global economic networks and flows, Caroline Nordstrom (2000, 2001, 2004) exposes the interplay between socio-cultural, political and economic processes occurring in what she terms the “shadows of war.” This thesis invokes Nordstrom’s (2004) concept of the shadows to explore war and conflict in Africa in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. The shadows, Nordstrom (2004, p. 106) explains, are the “complex sets of cross-state economic and political linkages that move outside formally recognised state based channels.” These are spaces beginning at the borders of “official state order” that can move in, along and outside the formally recognised institutions and activities they support (Nordstrom 2000, pp. 36-37; 2001, p. 216; 2004, p. 106). According to Nordstrom (2004, p. 35), the shadows are unmapped terrain, often clandestine in nature and “remain largely invisible to formal analysis.” There are people who “walk the shadows” and “tell their stories” (Nordstrom 2004, p. 85); whose accounts and lived experiences offer invaluable insights into the deeper social, cultural and political layers of war. It is former foreign military personnel who have utilised, exploited and

8 Staged at the epicentres of war zones, Nordstrom’s (2000, 2001, 2004) research is primarily focused on global financial and economic networks – the transactions of goods, services, people and exchanges that flow outside formal and legal state channels and international laws, all of which are, obscured in the “shadows”. As I will argue below, guided by the work of Nordstrom, it is possible to reapply and extend her specific use of the term “shadows” to other theoretical, empirical and ethnographic domains.
manoeuvred through the blurred, unregistered and only semi-regulated spaces of the shadows of war that this thesis seeks to examine.

Nordstrom (2000) prefers the term “shadows” to that of “illegal” as many actors and networks move back and fourth across lines of legality. She states:

I use the terms ‘shadows’ (rather than criminal or illegal) as the transactions defining these networks are not confined solely to criminal, illicit or illegal activities – but they do take place outside formal state institutions. The relationships of power and exchange I am concerned with…cross various divides between legal, quasi legal, gray markets and downright illegal activities (Nordstrom 2000, p. 36).

For instance, an emergency relief plane operating in Africa, as Nordstrom (2004) documents, can ferry aid by day and illicit goods by night, while the man working for an NGO is also engaged as a smuggler of gems across the borders of African states. This invocation of the “shadows” informs significant anthropological approaches to war, conflict and illicit practises (Feldman 1999; Gledhill 1999; Nordstrom 2000, 2001, 2004, 2007; Duffield 2001; Ferguson 2006; Gustafsson 2009).

The shadows, according to Nordstrom (2004), are intricate networks full of legal/illegal, licit/illicit and legitimate/illegitimate exchanges, transactions and practises. However, she employs these dichotomies not as “facts” or specific descriptors of behaviour or phenomenon, but as junctures between political, social and cultural processes. It is important to note that anthropologists invoke the concept of the shadows and point to the porous character of these classifications in two ways. First is to recognise that they form not opposite points as dichotomies, but instead reflect almost dialectical relationships between legal and illegal, licit and illicit and legitimate and illegitimate practises and processes. The second approach by contrast, acknowledges that people can indeed move in these shadows as if they were binaries. Instead of being fixed and rigid, the borders between illicit and licit, legal and illegal, illegitimate and legitimate are dynamic, blurred and porous (Nordstrom 2000, 2001, 2004, 2007). Yet at key points, people can (or at least can attempt) to fix them as binary positions within shadowed spaces. They continue to be powerful prescriptions people take up in their everyday lives. For Abraham and van Schendel (2005) these definitions are historically changeable and highly contested, and are determined by elites exercising power. They infiltrate the shadowed worlds of mercenary
manoeuvrings, diplomatic uncertainties and violent conflicts that so often take place far from the scrutiny of international assessment.

**Entering the Shadows**

These shadows are everywhere. Social, cultural and political life is comprised of multiple shadows. They transcend human constraints of time, structure, space and locale. People, places and processes are obscured in the shadows. For the purposes of this research there are certain aspects of Nordstrom’s (2000, 2001, 2004) theoretical and conceptual framework that need to be problematised. The overarching focus of her research is “not the story of individual people operating in the shadows, but a study of the vast networks of people who move goods and services world wide” (Nordstrom’s 2000, p. 36). While it remains important to investigate wider global politico-economic networks, attention still needs to be given to individuals and groups of people whose cultures and histories are concealed in the shadows of war. Therefore, this thesis concentrates on the inter-subjective understandings, practises and attachments of shadow actors – international state powers, politicians, diplomats and mercenary soldiers – who were embedded in the messy political, social and cultural forces driving Africa’s conflicts in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

There are also points in Nordstrom’s (2000, 2001, 2004) methodology that pose practical barriers for this thesis. Her research is driven by an ethnography that hinges on experiential investigation: ‘front line’ localised face-to-face encounters as being central components of fieldwork. She states that “ethnography is a discipline sophisticated in its simplicity: it travels with the anthropologists to the front lines and across lights and shadows to collect [these] stories” (Nordstrom 2004, p. 3). She asks, “What then is ethnography?” the answer she provides “is not the same for everyone. But for me, and for this particular research, ethnography must be able to follow the question [emphasis in original]. It must be able to capture not only the site, but also the smell, feel, taste, and motion of a locale, of a people that share a common space and intertwined lives” (Nordstrom 2004, p. 13).

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9 See also Marcus (1995, 2009); Hastrup & Olwig (1996); Holmes & Marcus (2005); Falzon (2009); and Leonard (2009).
contemporary setting of her work it is understandable that the present takes precedent over the past.

Nordstrom’s (2004) concept of the shadows also resonates with Stoler’s (2009) work on the nature of the colonial state and its ability to deal with disorder, ambiguity and instability. Stoler’s (2009, pp. 25-26) anthropological approach offers a unique methodological and analytical entry into imperial governance and the cultural and political content of archived documents. She argues that state archives provide a vibrant space to conduct ethnography into the “shadows” of colonial bureaucracy (Stoler 2009, pp. 25-26). To expand anthropological knowledge of war’s shadows, and the foreign military personnel who have moved throughout these ambiguous and unregistered realms, it is necessary to push disciplinary barriers with new insightful theoretical and methodological practises of ethnographic enquiry. By weaving together diverse approaches to fieldwork in efforts towards a multistranded ethnography – through attentiveness to archives, oral histories and participant observation – this research endeavours to do exactly that.

**Anthropology and “The Field”**

Anthropology\(^\text{10}\) is a discipline aimed at understanding the diverse and dynamic cultural groundings of social life. This thesis is dedicated to the ethnographic sensibilities that lie at the heart of the shadowed histories and cultures of foreign soldiers who served in Africa. The ethnography of this research explores the shadows of mercenarism in Africa between the 1960s and 1980s by examining official documents in government records and oral testimonies from former private soldiers now living in New Zealand and elsewhere. The worlds of private soldiering set in motion a new set of research issues: how to access and scrutinise primary accounts of a cultural phenomenon played out in past arenas of war and conflict. By employing a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995, 2009), composed of three bodies of knowledge from different locations (participant observation, official archives and oral histories), this research attempts to illuminate the intersections between political

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\(^{10}\) Here and throughout this thesis I use the term “anthropology” as short hand for socio-cultural anthropology, excluding other subfields: archaeology and biological anthropology.
processes and the lived experiences of foreign military personnel who fought in Africa’s wars.

Problematising Fieldwork: Critical approaches to “the field”

Mary Des Chene (1997, p. 71) suggests “the field may not be a place at all, but a period of time or a series of events.” As discussed in greater detail below, archived documents and oral history research can provide rich “field sites” that open ethnographic avenues to previously overlooked or displaced histories (Des Chene 1997; Stoler 2002a, 2009; Elkins 2005; Galloway 2006; Kan 2006). Such ethnohistorical orientations provide access to examine the nuances of socio-cultural, political and economic forces captured in the enduring shadows of past conflicts.

Since the 1970s anthropologists have, more explicitly, opened debates surrounding what actually constitutes fieldwork and its relationship with ethnographies (Rabinow 1977; Marcus & Fischer 1986; Clifford 1988; Rosaldo 1989; Marcus 1995; Hastrup & Olwig 1996; Des Chene 1997; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Falzon 2009; Leonard 2009). Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have made necessary steps towards rethinking fieldwork and decentring “the field” as the dominant site of anthropological knowledge. They argue that anthropological enquiry continues to be dominated by an over-emphasised and valorised tradition of fieldwork that leans “more heavily than ever on a methodological commitment to spend long periods in one localised setting” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997, p. 4).

Anthropology as a discipline is based on the practise of fieldwork as a located experience, where the ethnographer leaves their home and enters into a markedly different environment. These approaches to ethnography appear premised on cultural difference, “exotic locations” (Gleach 2005, p. 12), and “the search for previously understudied ‘fieldsites’” (Des Chene 1997, p. 68). What has emerged through this school of thought is distinction between ‘field’ and ‘home’, resting on spatial separation (Visweswaran 1994; Gupta & Ferguson 1997). ‘The field’ comes to represent the spacialisation of difference where “‘home’ is a place of cultural sameness and that difference is to be found ‘abroad’” which has long been “the

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11 Gupta and Ferguson (1997, pp. 5-45) explore in detail how the idea of “the field” has been historically constructed and constituted in anthropology and the implications it has had for professional and intellectual practises.
common sense of anthropology” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997, p. 32). This is the belief that some field sites are more ‘anthropological’ than others due to geographical and cultural differences. Historically located fieldwork has often been overshadowed by more traditional and orthodox practises of fieldwork.

Des Chene (1997) argues there are three aspects of ‘the field’ and ‘fieldwork’ that have influenced the development and endurance of ahistorical anthropology. First is the pursuit of maximal cultural difference in ‘unstudied’ fieldsites; second is treating the past as a homogenous period; and third is that views about history and historiography in the kind of locales to which anthropologists traditionally went “seem either impossible or unproductive” (Des Chene 1997, p. 68). Furthermore, she alludes to the disadvantage of dominant traditional understandings of fieldwork in the way it emphasises participant observation and has a tendency to be ahistorical (Des Chene 1997). There is, however, great potential in using historical sources, such as state archives, oral and written testimonies, as valued sites of anthropological knowledge. Gupta and Ferguson (1997, pp. 38-39) have argued for the need to soften up the divisions between traditional ethnographic knowledge and other forms of representation flowing out of historical material.

### Historical Anthropology

Ethnographic sensibilities can be elicited from the past. Therefore the field becomes much more than just a geographical location (Marcus 1995, 2009; Des Chene 1997; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Gleach 2005; Kan 2006, Falzon 2009, Leonard 2009). There is a strengthening dialogue between anthropology and history, between the past and the present. Since a call made by Edward Evans-Pritchard in 1961, anthropology and history have become increasingly entangled, brought together through original theoretical and empirical research and critical explorations, emerging as a legitimate field of ethnographic knowledge in its own right (Evans-Pritchard 1961; Cohn 1980;

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12 Gupta and Ferguson (1997, p. 13) suggest the binary between “field” and “home” represents a “hierarchy of purity” of field sites. They argue there is a tendency to determine the value of anthropological research based on the spatial distance that fieldwork is conducted from a researcher's 'home.' They state, “[A]fter all, if ‘the field’ is most appropriately a place that is ‘not home,’ then some places will necessarily be more ‘not at home’ than others and hence more appropriate, more ‘fieldlike’” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997, p. 13). The authors suggest that despite many anthropologists denying there is a privileging of more ‘natural’ and understudied fieldsites, it remains true in practise.

Yet purists of the fieldwork tradition have criticised the value in historical materials, such as archived documents, deeming them “at best supplementary, never, constitutive of fieldwork” (Des Chene 1997, p. 76). Sentiments of “arm chair anthropology” are echoed by sceptics who suggest such approaches to fieldwork fail to truly capture the complexity, vibrancy and diversity of lived worlds believed only possible by immersion within a community or locale. For Mary Des Chene (1997), however, the key challenges concern the relationship between fieldwork and history and the way historical material can be (under)valued in anthropology. She points out that when historical material starts to take centre stage it provokes considerable anxiety amongst traditionalists. As discussed by Gupta and Ferguson (1997), this epistemological division needs bridging through the forging of links between different knowledge(s) from diverse sources. They argue we should not abandon the practise of fieldwork, but rather decentre it from its position of privilege, and then recover it as one element in a multistranded methodology. Before I discuss employing a multistranded method for the purposes of this research, this chapter will give specific attention to archives and oral histories as valuable bodies of anthropological knowledge.
**Archives as an Anthropological Experience**

In its own right the archive has become a valuable and legitimate field site for an increasing number of anthropologists to visit (Dirks 1993, 2002; Des Chene 1997; Stoler 2002a, 2002b, 2009; Rawlings 2011; Trundle 2011b; Trundle & Kaplonski 2011). While many still consider the archive as “more like a library than like a field site,” and certainly never constitutive of fieldwork, some anthropologists argue ethnography may in fact be “conducted wholly in the archives” (Des Chene 1997 p. 76).

Des Chene’s (1997) argument is premised on several key points worth recognising. First, that the condensation of archival material into notes is an interpretive task similar to writing fieldnotes. Second, archival research provides “extraordinary possibilities” (Des Chene 1997, p. 78). Des Chene’s (1997) research on Gurkhas has ranged across 180 years. “Even the hardiest of fieldworkers do not live so long”, she reflects (Des Chene 1997, p. 78). Thus the archives have enabled her to simultaneously access an otherwise impossible array of subjects: “governor-generals and countercolonial organizers, soldiers on opposite sides of the battle lines” (Des Chene 1997, p. 78). Stoler (2009) insists that archives are in fact ethnographically charged sites where we must not only tend to documents just as the historical substance of ethnography. Having conducted part of this research in the archives I, like many scholars before me, experienced the evocative and compelling socio-cultural and political forces active in official state documentation.

While travelling to the United Kingdom in May 2010 my supervisor suggested I consider visiting the BNA in Kew, London. No more than 24 hours later, on 25 May 2010 did I find myself excitedly sitting at a partitioned desk in the second floor viewing room about to open the first of 60 official government files pertaining to mercenaries in Africa from the 1960s to the early 1980s. Their covers told me, in large conspicuous red or pink block lettering that these were once “SECRET” or “CLASSIFIED” files. What aberrant secrets lay within these thick folders? Why was the British government so concerned about mercenaries in Africa? I queried to myself. All of a sudden my senses were on edge. I became flooded with feelings of intrigue and excitement. Despite the constant cool dry air conditioning I had developed a slight bead of sweat across my brow and increasingly clammy palms. Poised and

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13 See also Stoler (2009) and Rawlings (2011).
14 I am immensely grateful to my supervisor, Dr Greg Rawlings, for his encouragement, invaluable ideas and assistance in preparing me for my initial visit to the British National Archives (BNA).
ready, I snatched a glance around the prosaic room, barely even noticing other readers busy in their own worlds. An obstinate archive security member, who was wearing a black earpiece, grey pants and a navy blue blazer, stealthily slipped by my table while on one of her countless roaming patrols. I had, at this point, become aware of the nervous and excited shake in both hands as I reached for the first selected file: “FCO 65/1766, Mercenaries in Africa (Part A), 1976.” In opening the folder, I was astounded at its stiffness and rigidity. Nonetheless I prised it open and my experience in the field of archives began.

My two weeks of research at the BNA continued the ventures I had been making into ‘the field’ as an apprentice anthropologist since arriving in Ghana. Driven by an inherent curiosity and beginner’s zeal I was determined to make the experience a successful one. I was surprised at how efficient the whole process was. Technology made accessing the files enjoyably straightforward. I had entered the title “mercenary” into the online BNA database, clicked search and on the screen appeared a vast list of files. I compiled a hand written index of available documents relating to mercenaries in various parts of Africa. Once inside the archive at Kew it was simply a process of finding a computer, swiping my recently acquired reader’s ticket (a plastic bar-coded photograph Identification Card), requesting the files to view, picking them up from my allocated pigeon hole, uplifting them and finally taking them back to my reading desk.

Several months later I travelled to the National Archives of New Zealand in Wellington where I immediately noticed subtle differences in archiving conventions. An online search of the database told me there were no official records on mercenaries. The same anticipation and excitement I felt in London was suddenly expunged. I was, momentarily, unsure what exactly to do. Changing tack, I then searched for those sub-Saharan African territories that were in conflict during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. I soon found documents pertaining to Angola, Congo, Nigeria, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and Mozambique. These were my countries of focus. I now had the time consuming task of wading through thousands of pages of material in the hope of locating New Zealand’s official responses to mercenarism in Africa. Yet unlike the BNA, some of the files I sought were restricted. Due to fastidious protocol regulating the access to these restricted files I depended on more traditional fieldwork relations. Establishing healthy rapport with government officials and public servants proved crucial. After a flurry of letter writing, emails, phone calls and in-person
meetings I eventually gained government security clearance to view these documents. Encouraged by gaining this clearance I systematically went through every file. Euphorically I started discovering fragmented records of the New Zealand government’s involvement, reactions and concerns with mercenary activity in Africa.

Affect of the Archive

Research in both the British and New Zealand national archives yielded a wealth of information. I found myself immersed within the intersecting worlds of conflict, politics, diplomacy and mercenary soldiering. I was gripped by accounts such as that of Colonel R.E. Brook-Fox who wrote to the British Ministry of Defence on 1 November 1967 providing intelligence on military events in the Congo. Brook-Fox witnessed Congolese National Army [Armée Nationale Congolaise] soldiers “filled with drink or dope” pushing “into the attack” only to be “shot down in heaps by mercenaries and Katangese who replenish their ammunition from the corpses but make no effort to bury them.”

Chillingly, in another file I read explicit eyewitness accounts of the brutal and ruthless mercenary officer, Major Cassidy, who on 16 December 1966 at 11.45pm, inside a Kinshasa bar “shot Mr T.J. Bottomley dead after a rather minor dispute.” Then in Wellington, I read a body of correspondence and intelligence reports concerning the export of 14 Vampire jet aircraft (purchased from the Royal New Zealand Air Force [RNZAF]) along with a “large quantity of ammunition” from a New Zealand company to the Rhodesian air force in 1975. As a member of the UN, obliged to implement trade sanctions against Rhodesia during the late 1960s and 1970s (see chapter 3), the pressing issue for the New Zealand government was their “clear-cut obligation to prevent the supply of any goods from this country [New Zealand] to Rhodesia.”

I witnessed the shadowed intersections of private companies, governments, diplomacy, political processes and conflict being fought in Africa.\textsuperscript{19}

The “affect” of the official records made it difficult to disengage with the material. On the train ride from Kew to West Hampstead my mind was often consumed with events such as the late June and early July 1976 trial of ten British mercenaries in Luanda, Angola which was meticulously detailed by “Mr H C Byatt, Official British Observer” in his 28 page report.\textsuperscript{20} Waiting in a queue at the supermarket check-out line on Finchley road in London I thought about the August 1976 Diplock Report of the committee of privy counsellors appointed to inquire into the recruitment of mercenaries presented to parliament by British Prime Minister James Callaghan on its completion.\textsuperscript{21} Several months later, and back in New Zealand, after finishing a day’s research at the national archives in Wellington on 14 September 2010, I read an intelligence report received from Canberra on 22 March 1976 from a sensitive Australian source working amongst policy makers in the US government. They claimed the Americans were indirectly encouraging the use of force in Rhodesia by “leaving insulted white Rhodesians believing… if they stick it out they will be bailed out.”\textsuperscript{22} This revealed New Zealand’s connections and understandings of the wider more surreptitious web of diplomacy and international politics that surrounded conflicts in Africa where foreign military personnel and mercenaries were fighting.

It was the boldness with which all the documents I accessed from Britain and New Zealand had once been elevated to the status of “secret” that left me curious, tentative and puzzled. There was a sense of shadowiness to it all. Mary Douglas (1987, p. 69) reminds us that “institutions create shadowed places in which nothing can be seen and no questions asked.” In examining the nuanced nature of colonial governance in the Dutch East-Indies (Indonesia), as interpreted through archival habits and conventions, Stoler (2009, pp. 25-26) refers to the archive as a “shadowed place” formed through official secrecy and controlled by the state. It is, as Stoler

\textsuperscript{19} See ABHS 950, Acc. W4627, 4003/ 245/4/6 4.
\textsuperscript{21} See Diplock Committee: British Mercenaries in Angola, 1976, FCO 47/836.
(2009, p. 26) points out, the “seduction of state secrets” which fuelled my excited expectations of accessing the shadows of bureaucracy. She suggests that this kind of reaction is a tendency to covet what the state conceals, regarding its secrets as “accurate measures of its most nefarious intents: unmasking its magic and deceptive opacities is our calling” (Stoler 2009, p. 26).

As alluded to by Stoler (2009), and as my own research exposed, documents earmarked for confidentiality in official archives were in some cases not secrets at all. When the BBC’s Panorama documentary on the recruitment of mercenaries for Rhodesia publicly screened on television on the 19 July 1976 it caused a stir within the FCO. A flurry of interdepartmental correspondence ensued and transcripts of the programme were carefully scrutinised due to the serious allegations raised. A confidential four-page document was quickly compiled summarising the “allegations made in the programme which are matters for the British authorities.”23 What was secret in such a document was not the specific subject matter but “the timing and interpretive uncertainties about an appropriate government response” (Stoler 2009, pp. 27-28).

**Archival Forms: Public records, private lives**

When conducting fieldwork in the archives we must not overlook the cultures of archived documents. Stoler (2009, pp. 15-14) recognises how state archives occupy a space that “transcends officially designated archival collections” arguing, “the borders that define the ‘official’ and the ‘non-official’ are hard to trace.” The composition of archival sources is significant. Private official texts (reports, diplomatic cables, inter-agency correspondence and hand written notes from officials) occupy only part of state records. Governments collect material well within the public domain (open source information) such as newspaper clippings, flyers, pamphlets and published memoirs, as well as private/personal documents including letters, written testimonies, original interview transcripts, and photographs. These two archival forms are often perceived as mutually exclusive bodies of information. However, my own research

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reveals a much more messier entanglement of public and private lives which are documented in official archives.

When examining file “FO 1100/41, Mercenaries in the Congo, 1966” at the BNA in Kew, I came across a rather arbitrarily placed four page hand written letter, headed “Ndolo Mid-Day, Kinshasa Congo”, addressed “Dear Roy and family” and signed “[R]egards and good wishes in Rutherford, Ian.”24 This evocative letter was from a British mercenary, incarcerated in a Congolese prison after he and an Australian pilot, Joe Larkin, escaped their initial capture only to be detained in Rwanda and extradited back to Kinshasa. Ian gave vivid accounts of being subject to violent beatings with “rubber truncheons and fists” and still being held in “the cachet – black box – for the last 42 days with bed bugs, endemic malaria and dysentery and the smell of urine.”25 He also wrote in detail about friends and family in the United Kingdom, experiences with Congolese authorities and British Embassy officials in Kinshasa, the failure of the Foreign Office to act on his extradition plea and his “arbitrary [sic] and unfair ‘trial’ at Bakavu.”26 He also spoke of Jean “who is still studying a 3 year course to become an Australian government librarian”, along with the books he read to “take one’s mind off the pressures of present events”, and the “glorious and great men of the British empire.”27 Ian even confessed, “I realise I have been rash and stupid – though I had my reasons – and although there is more than this than meets the eye which I can’t risk explaining how I got into this mess!”28 With melancholic undertones he conceded the bleak prospect of freedom.

Within the file there are no internal reference points officially recognising or acknowledging Ian’s letter. Yet the presence of this private correspondence reveals how the state’s collection of public and private material blurs the boundaries between state secret and private torment. The fact I could access Ian’s letter from inside the archive, over 40 years later, is evidence of how writings circulate far from their origins giving them a sense of political importance. Yet it sheds light not only on the mobility of documents, but also on the mobility of people. This also reinforces Stoler’s (2009) point about the “affect” of archives, as these active mercenary

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
networks and the lives of family, friends, comrades and government officials intersect in the shadow spaces between conflict zones in Africa and the corridors of Whitehall.

When artefacts such as Ian’s letter appear in state records they counter the notion that the archive is a coherent repository of information. Like traditional approaches to “the field”, archives only ever provide fragmentary knowledge (Trundle 2011a). From research in the British and New Zealand national archives I collated a range of official reports, memos, diplomatic cables and interdepartmental correspondence, which was complimented by private letters, newspaper clippings and photographs. All of these various documents provided rich ethnographic insights into the shadowed worlds of mercenary soldiering in Africa. Nevertheless, official archives are also imbrued with political biases and careful silences. This research, I quickly realised, would be enhanced by drawing from multiple bodies of anthropological knowledge.

Oral Histories

It became apparent that only a minority of surviving freelance military personnel wrote and published memoirs of their experiences of fighting in Africa, and seemingly none from a New Zealand perspective. It felt necessary to extend the ethnographic dimension of this thesis by observing and speaking with former foreign soldiers. Their personal accounts are essential narratives that complement the compelling stories found in official archival material. Furthermore, coupled with research at the archives in Wellington, they also give a New Zealand angle to this thesis. Yet akin to state records, oral testimonies are also fragmentary bodies of knowledge. They represent a person’s subjective remembering of past events (Portelli 1981, 1991, 2006; Hue 2000; Harenven 2002; Elkins 2005; Bochma, Scaia, Bonofacio & Roberts 2008; Sugimun 2009). But, invaluably, these firsthand accounts give a human face to the shadowed worlds of former military personnel who fought in Africa between 1960 and 1980.

29 There are a number of former mercenaries who have published their memoirs of fighting in various African conflicts as popular books (see Banks 1978; Dempster & Tomkins 1978; Hoare 1989, 2008; McAleese 1993; Steiner 1978; Tomkin 2009). I have not yet discovered any written testimonies from New Zealanders who had served in any of the African conflicts.
By considering oral narratives this research is aimed at accessing multiple representations of the past. From the outset of the project it was my intention to use oral testimonies as another method of delving into the shadows of mercenarism. There are however caveats surrounding the use of memory as a repository of “accurate” and “believable” knowledge. Elkins (2005, p. 373) raises two important issues applicable to this research. First, the constant interaction between the past and the present in human memory, whereby “oral testimonies tell us much about a person’s current state of mind and the society in which he or she lives as they do about a particular historical moment” (Elkins 2005, p. 373). Second, memories are, as Elkins (2005) recognises, fragmentary and fallible to greater or lesser extents.30

Accuracy and authenticity are issues facing any researcher drawing from oral history. In the early stages of speaking with former foreign soldiers who had served in Africa I became increasingly aware of temporality within their testimonies. They were compressing months, years and even lifetimes into the stories they shared with me. Therefore, the depth of time and memory and how this is represented becomes an issue the researcher must consider (Portelli 2006; Sugiman 2006, 2009; Bochma et al 2008). Initially I became concerned that discrepancies in time could lead to inconsistencies in their recollections and potentially obscure and disrupt important detail. Yet White (2001, p. 291) reminds us:

lives and experiences are not such simple and straight forward things that they lend themselves to easy representation; people do not give testimony that fits neatly into chronological or cosmological accounts. Instead they talk both about what happened to them and what they did about it, but they also use themselves as a medium by which to talk about other things.

Being the listener in the interviews I too played a crucial role in the exchange. White (2001) reiterates Stephen Miescher’s (1997) argument that there is no single version of a person’s own life; personal narratives change because they are in dialogue

30 There is evidence supporting the notion that those who have experienced violent pasts either prefer to forget them or cannot remember them. On the contrary, the same evidence suggests traumatic events, when recalled, are more accurately remembered (see, for instance, Antze & Lambeck 1996; Caruth 1995; Cole 2001; Daniel 1996; Friedlander 1979). When I first decided to use oral testimonies, in the early stages of this project, I was unsure how exactly experiences of violence may effect and inhibit the accounts of potential participants. This also results in synergies between the psychology of memory and the anthropology of violence (Meeker 1975; Rosaldo 1980; Malkki 1995; Swedenburg 1995; Mahmood 1996a, 1996b; Robben 1996, 2005; Robben & Suárez-Orozco 2000a, 2000b; Delich 2001; Schröder & Schmidt 2001; Kwon 2008; Argenti & Schram 2010).
between the speaker and audiences. It was a limited ability to understand their stories against my own experiences that ultimately shaped what was and was not said.

When dealing with oral testimonies accuracy is always ambiguous. This becomes problematic when pursuing codes of historical objectivity that has a tendency to fetishise over “facts” and “truth value” (Cruikshank 1989, p. 27). My focus, however, is on subjectivities – the study of cultural forms and processes by which individuals express their sense of themselves in history (Portelli 1991, 2006).

Perks and Thomas (1998) believe the unique and precious element which oral sources force, and which no other sources possess in equal measure, is the speaker’s subjectivity. Yet the emphasis, as Cruikshank (1989, 1992) suggests, is not so much on filtering out historical evidence from peoples recollections, but the differences in social and cultural interpretations of past events. Oral testimonies do not lead to a comfortable and neat synthesis. Instead they provide multiple viewpoints, meanings and representations of the past that are small pieces of a complex puzzle. Nonetheless this fragmentary knowledge is crucial to accessing shadowed worlds as lived experiences. This project thus examines the relationship between the subjectivity of the field and the affect of the archive.

**The Process: Accessing former foreign soldiers**

While sitting at the archive in Kew, London I kept thinking how useful it would be to include the voices of those soldiers at the centre of the “mercenary problem” in Africa. Having narrowed the scope of the research to focus on British and New Zealand perspectives on mercenarism in Africa between the 1960s and 1980s I began making a series of discoveries in the archived files. These were direct references from the British government about New Zealand citizens being recruited to fight for the Smith regime in Rhodesia and the New Zealand government’s response. When I read in file FCO 36/1876 the newspaper article from *The Press*, 7 January 1977 titled “Scores of N.Z. Men Enlist in Rhodesia” and a diplomatic cable from the British High Commission in Wellington that discussed the recruitment of New Zealanders for

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Rhodesia, I realised there was a real chance veterans from the Rhodesian bush war could be living in New Zealand.

When I expressed this hunch to my supervisor he too was confident there could be former soldiers living in New Zealand who served not only in Rhodesia but other African conflicts from the period 1960 to 1980, including Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, Nigeria and the Congo. Further encouraged by his support I set about testing this hypothesis in two ways. First I conducted a comprehensive internet search to see whether there were any associations or organisations of veteran soldiers from various African conflicts that were based in New Zealand. Second, I advertised in a selection of local New Zealand newspapers for “Former Soldiers in Africa” who may be willing to share their stories and experiences of conflict. Both approaches were successful.

It was the association of former military personnel who served in Africa that generated the majority of my research participants. Having discovered these organisations I set about contacting them. Several responded promptly to my introductory email and showed an interest in this research. However, they had voiced concerns about my intent. As it became clear from our initial correspondence they had been troubled by previous experiences with reporters who had, they told me, brought their associations into disrepute. In our continued correspondence I provided, via email, the necessary detail of the project. This included a three-page participant information sheet. It stipulated that the research had been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee under code F10/003, and also included 12 indicative interview questions. For both parties this was a crucial part of the process. Not only did it clearly outline the criteria of the participants I was seeking to interview but also for them, it legitimised my intentions as a researcher. This has influenced the referencing of interviews throughout this thesis. Interviews are cited according to general location (invariably the North Island), country, month and year.

33 I intentionally worded the advertisement “Former Soldiers in Africa Wanted” for two main reasons. First, should I have narrowed the criteria to New Zealand soldiers I would have excluded any other foreign nationals who fought in Africa now living in New Zealand. Second, I was aware of the Rhodesian and South African Diaspora to New Zealand during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. There was a real chance that some of these people completed official military service and had been deployed in various African conflicts. If so, they may have been able to recall whether they served alongside any New Zealand or other foreign nationals and where these people now lived.
34 My academic responsibility of protecting one’s sources prevents me naming any of the associations and participants and also influences the referencing of interviews.
While this may be viewed as limiting precision and makes it challenging to distinguish interviews from one another, it has the benefit of enhancing the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of research participants and their stories, not only for a wider readership but also, importantly, from one another as well. I had developed and fostered a good relationship with one particular individual in an international association of former military personnel who had served in Africa. As it transpired, this person had a great deal of sway and was extremely accommodating to my requests as he became fully informed on the aims of my research. This man introduced me to all members of the association in one of their monthly electronic newsletters. There was a small section towards the end of the newsletter detailing my research. The last paragraph read:

I am always wary of these sort of requests and as such I have corresponded extensively with William and I have satisfied myself that he is not ‘up to mischief’ and consequently I have offered him my every assistance. I hope that some of you will also help him to get the facts as they were, and not as perceived. I believe it is especially important for those New Zealanders who fought in [omitted] or [omitted] to correspond with William because by your own admissions to me on many occasions - many of you were seriously maligned ‘back home’ in New Zealand (Anonymous newsletter 2010).

Over several weeks numerous people contacted me by email expressing their willingness to participate in the research. I was suddenly alerted to a whole network of former foreign soldiers who had travelled to and fought in Africa.

Having now established an entry point with the association I was invited to attend one of their reunions. This provided an invaluable opportunity and another significant breakthrough in accessing more research participants. It also presented an occasion to undertake participant observation, providing a third body of anthropological knowledge. At the reunion I immersed myself amongst those who were in attendance. During this time I established a good rapport with two important contacts who took me around and personally introduced me to those who met my participant criteria. As I spoke to members I explained my research and asked if they were willing to be interviewed. All of the people I either approached or was

35 For precedents in this style of referencing see Rawlings (2005) and (2007).
36 Further details are not provided to preserve confidentiality of research participants and the veterans association.
introduced to agreed. I now had access to a group of former foreign soldiers who between them had served in six different African conflicts.

Research Environments

When dealing with acts of representation, in the form of oral testimonies, it is important to consider the effect research environments can have over a person’s subjective positioning. From the interviews I conducted with former foreign soldiers now living in New Zealand and abroad, I began realising the extent to which setting influenced their recollections of events, processes, relationships and individuals. In October 2010, when I attended the gathering of veteran soldiers from various African conflicts, someone introduced me to a New Zealand man willing to speak of his experiences of serving in Southern Africa. Both standing at the bar, close-by another group of attendees engaged in their own conversations, we began discussing his experiences. Finding it difficult to hear over the noise of everyone socialising in the room I asked if we could hold a more formal interview sometime over the next week. With a display of great relief he suggested it would be best if I was to visit him at his home. He was leaving the function in an hour and wanted to talk in greater depth, without the distractions and influences from other people. When I interviewed him one week later at his family home in a small New Zealand city he was much more open and talkative than the night of the veterans’ annual reunion.

Yet there is also the point of what would have happened had I spent time with these former soldiers in Africa instead of New Zealand? Reflecting on her 1991 study on the history of Nepali men’s careers as Gurkha soldiers in the British and Indian armies, Des Chene (1997) confronts similar methodological issues. Situated in a large Nepalese village, Des Chene spoke with former Gurkhas who had served in the Malaya and Borneo conflicts. Six years later she asked, “[W]hat might it add to my understanding to walk with former Gurkhas in the jungles of Malaysia or Borneo?” She continues:

Clearly, one cannot return to the “Malaya Emergency” in which so many of these men fought. But one could return to the site where a man killed Chinese guerrillas. Talking about it there rather than (or
in addition to) talking in his distant home would inevitably evoke different kinds of memories (Des Chene 1997, p. 75).

One of the men I interviewed made this connection himself when he commented, “Ah, well maybe my take on things would be a little different if you spoke to me back in Rhodesia” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). The influences of place and time over a person’s recollection of the past are important caveats in anthropological research.

When collecting the oral testimonies of former soldiers in Africa I discovered the importance of not only recording people’s stories but also observing the ways they negotiate and interact with their environment. This involves paying close attention to the synergies between the research milieu and a person’s subjective positioning from which they speak. To revert back to White’s (2001) earlier point, people’s lives and experiences are not so straightforward to understand in their totality. As Cruikshank (1989) puts it, the pictures we get from people’s oral testimonies are not black and white, clear-cut and orderly. Instead, they are messy and deeply nuanced. It is no surprise that dealing with oral testimonies is an academic task steeped in complexity. Yet despite some scholars critiquing oral histories and memory as methodologically and theoretically problematic,

**Oral Testimonies as Evocative Experiences**

What struck me most about these oral testimonies was how evocative and compelling they were. It was not just that these narratives evoked realities of war; for some of these soldiers it was the first time they shared such intimate details. As one man told me while we walked down his driveway to my car having just completed an interview, “You know, when I think about it, that’s the first time I’ve told somebody so much. Well in the last few years I’ve started to open up a bit more, but not this much” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Yet it varied amongst each former private soldier on how much personal information they would reveal. Some

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37 In this methodological potentiality Des Chene (1997) recognises the financial as well as conceptual barriers to such approaches.

38 For discussions surrounding the criticisms leveled against oral history see Grele (1998, 2007).
intersected with past and present political situations while others positioned themselves at either the centre or to the side of their narratives.

During the interviews there were moments I found myself thrust into the realities of someone else’s war. As they spoke I would vividly recreate the scenes of their stories in my mind. There was one instance where I witnessed a soldier’s parachute failing to properly deploy while on an “official” raid into a neighbouring African state. As the man hit the ground his right leg struck a protruding rock. He recalled the cracking noise the bones made as they shattered. Having fallen unconscious for several minutes he awoke and conducted self-examination to gauge the extent of the injuries that he knew he had sustained. He was able to move his fingers in both hands, wiggle his toes in his left boot, but no movement in the right. He slid his hand down his leg to discover both bones had pierced the material of his military fatigues. It took “just under an hour for the medic to find me. I owe him my life” he told me (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, November 2010). More than just evocative journeys, the significance of these oral histories, when used alongside other sources, are the recovery of neglected or silenced accounts of past experiences that challenge those posed by dominant histories (Cruikshank 1989, 1992; Blee 1993; Kennedy 1998; Morrissey 1998).

Multistranded Ethnography

In her research, Caroline Elkin’s (2005) has cast new light on the dark shadows of the last years of Britain’s colonial rule in Kenya. She draws from multiple bodies of information, including official and private archives, fieldwork experiences and extensive oral testimonies from those who witnessed, inflicted or endured the brutalities of violence. Elkins (2005) recaptures the necessary complexity of entangled social, political and cultural processes that had long been overlooked by scholars, journalists, officials and other writers. Yet the significance of her study is not just in illuminating a violent past but the way it is exemplary of a multistranded ethnography – one that forges intricate and skilful links between different bodies of knowledge.

Gupta and Ferguson (1997, p. 37) have argued for the need to recognise ethnography as a “flexible and opportunistic strategy for diversifying and making
more complex our understandings of various places, people and predicaments” through an attentiveness to different forms of knowledge. Taking this as my anthropological cue I set about weaving together three distinct bodies of knowledge – archived documents, oral testimonies and participant observation – in an effort to explore the shadowed lives of former soldiers who served in Africa. To consult oral and written sources, Cruikshank (1989, p. 26)\textsuperscript{39} argues, is not about establishing the most plausible account of “what really happened” but different perspectives of “actors embedded in different culturally distinct networks of social relationships.”

Over the course of this chapter I have attempted to present a theoretical and methodological framework that follows Gupta and Ferguson’s (1997) call for innovative practises of fieldwork that transgress the disciplinary boundaries set by expectations of “real fieldwork”. By employing a multistranded ethnography I set about problematising long standing divisions in anthropological enquiry. As a disciplinary practise of anthropology, ethnographic fieldwork allows us to access diverse research areas as interactive sites to learn about the intricacies of human life. Making the same point, Marcus (1995) and Nordstrom (2004) have suggested that ethnography must be able to follow the question. The research methods of this thesis, as a concerted effort to piece together multiple representations of the past, has led me on an evocative journey through corridors of archived power in Britain and New Zealand; to courtrooms in Africa where foreigners were sentenced to death for “mercenary acts”; to the battle fronts of the Congo or Nigeria; and inside the homes of former foreign soldiers in Africa now living in New Zealand.

\textsuperscript{39} See also Neuman (1992).
Contextualising Mercenarism and Conflict in a Decolonising Africa

From 1960 to 1990 African countries south of the Maghreb have been exposed to more deadly conflict than any other region in the world except South East Asia (Gurr 1991, p. 153). This has included 18 full-scale civil wars (Gurr 1991, p. 153), eight of which took place between 1960 and 1980 (Small & Singer 1982, pp. 231-232). These eight conflicts emerged during a wave of decolonisation that swept over the continent during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. This widespread and sustained political violence opened channels of opportunity for private military personnel to immerse themselves in Africa’s conflicts. Musah and Fayemi (2000, p. 27) identify this period as the “golden age” of mercenaries in Africa, when their actions had adverse impacts on the stability of the continent. This thesis is focused on this era as a specific time and setting when mercenary soldiers were exploiting the shadows of war. This chapter is divided into two parts. Part one provides a brief historical overview of mercenary activity. In doing so it maps the transition from legitimate and normative mercenary practises to the state’s use of standing citizen armies, which in turn made the employment of private and foreign soldiers illicit, illegitimate and in some cases illegal. Part two thematically examines Africa’s conflicts from the 1960s to the 1980s through the politics of decolonisation, ‘race’ and Cold War rivalries. It recognises that although these conflicts were fought in particular African locales they were not mutually exclusive and isolated but instead politically, ideologically and militarily entangled.

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40 The Maghreb is a region of North West Africa that includes Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia and Mauritania.
Part One: Mercenarism – an historical trajectory

“When Alexander invaded Asia in 334 B.C. his army included 5,000 mercenaries, and the Persian army that faced him at Issos contained 10,000” (Kiernan 1957, p. 66). Mercenary soldiers have participated in wars since antiquity through to the current era of neo-liberal conflict (Burchett & Roebuck 1977; Mockler 1987; Tickler 1987; Perlstein 1988; Thomson 1990; Thomson 1994; Trundle 1997, 2005, 2008; Nossal 1998; Arnold 1999; Fawcett 1999; Musah & Fayemi 2000; Lanning 2005; Percy 2003, 2007a, 2007b; Abrahamsen & Williams 2007). As Kiernan (1957) reveals, foreign soldiers serving in organised armies for pay can be traced back more than 25 centuries. Xenophon’s Anabasis account of 10,000 Greek mercenaries, including himself, who were employed to take part in a Civil War in the Persian Empire, provides an insight to the origins of what is now conceptualised as mercenarism (see Parke 1933; Roy 1967; Lee 2008).41 As Trundle (2008, p. 27) observes, “[A]ntiquity played a role in bringing to the modern world the image of the foreigner fighting for pay in a foreign land.”

Kiernan (1957, p. 66) argues that one of the most significant epochs where mercenaries “may be seen most hard at work is the one that links medieval and modern Europe, when absolute monarchy and the modern state were taking shape.”42 Monarchs and feudal rulers in Europe had made use of foreign soldiers both at home and abroad. In England, during the late 12th Century, Henry II and Richard I hired soldiers from the Basque country, Navarre and Galloway, while 10,000 of the 12,500 soldiers of Edward I’s army that invaded Scotland in 1228 were Welsh (Kiernan 1957, p. 70). In 1554 Henry VIII had relied on German, Dutch and Burgandian mercenaries in the wars he waged across continental Europe (Kiernan 1957, p. 73). In 1690 at the Battle of Boyne, William III employed soldiers from Ulster (Northern Ireland), Holland, Scotland, France (Huguenots), Denmark, Sweden, and Prussia (Jackson 1947, p. 63). The monarchs of France also depended heavily on foreign mercenaries over this period. During the 15th and 16th Centuries Swiss, German, English, Italian, Polish, Greek and Scottish soldiers were recruited into French armies (Kiernan 1957). At the Battle of Dunes in 1658 the French army contained Scottish and Irish

41 Notably, John Lee (2008) provides a comprehensive social and cultural history of the mercenaries of Xenophon’s Anabasis. In doing so he draws on ancient literacy, archaeological evidence, comparative material and perspectives from military sociology and war studies.
42 Anthony Mockler (1987, pp. 1–18) also addresses the ubiquity of mercenaries during this period.
regiments while the Spanish army they were fighting included one Scottish, English and three Irish regiments (Fortescue 1899, pp. 270-271).

Throughout the 13th century foreign mercenaries were recruited into Italian city-state militias (McCormack 1993; Percy 2007a). As Percy (2007a) describes, the Condottiere system in Italy was a contract signed between cities and mercenary captains who led units of foreign soldiers. She suggests, “Italy was flooded with mercenaries looking for work between 1360 and 1369, a pause during the hostilities of the Hundred Years War” (Percy 2007a, p. 75). However, it was the Swiss who were the most proficient at exploiting the growing market for mercenaries during the decline of the feudalism in Europe. Swiss recruiting officers were the first to create an official system of hiring out mercenary armies for commercial gains. These were, in essence, the original independent mercenary companies (Kiernan 1957; Mockler 1987; McCormack 1993; Percy 2007a). While the Swiss had developed a special link with France, German mercenaries indiscriminately served in armies all over Europe. Kiernan (1957, p. 71) argues, “[S]oldiers from Germany, which had no national army, helped to build up almost every organised state in Europe.” So immense were markets for mercenaries during the middle ages that foreign soldiers offering themselves for hire constituted one of the major export trades in Europe (Kiernan 1957).

The 16th century saw a significant shift in the way mercenaries were recruited and deployed. As the modern nation-state began to grow out of conditions of civil war, European monarchies strengthened their rule by using standing armies composed primarily of foreign soldiers. By the 16th and 17th Centuries mercenaries were incorporated into standardised units of the army and used as part of the modern state-apparatus to suppress rebellions (Kiernan 1957; Thomson 1990; Percy 2007a). However, it was not only monarchs who were employing foreign soldiers during this period. Rebellions headed by “moneyed men” could hire their own mercenaries (Kiernan 1957, p. 75). In May 1525 Michael Gaismair, leader of the Tyrolean revolt in the German Peasants’ War, hired mercenaries to mount a successful resistance against Habsburg ruler (Stayer 2000, p. 137). During the French religious wars (1562-

43 Mockler (1987, p. 7) argues that Italian mercenary leaders during this period, like Francesco Sforza, grew wealthy from their military exploits and “founded noble houses and became themselves rulers of states.”
44 Kiernan (1957, p. 71) purports that some employers may have preferred mercenaries from Germany because they had less solidarity among themselves and therefore could be purchased cheaper and cheated more easily.
the Huguenots, “mostly gentlemen-cavalry”, employed 14,000 German mercenaries (*landsknechts*) to fight against the French Crown (Kiernan 1957, p. 75).

Thomson (1990, p. 24) argues that during the 1700s armies in Europe were multi-national forces made up of mercenary soldiers. She claims that “[F]oreigners constituted at least one-quarter and as much as 60 percent of these regular standing armies” (Thompson 1990, p. 24). Mercenaries could exploit cosmopolitan locales and porous political borders to serve in foreign militaries for pay. During the 18th Century Swiss soldiers were employed in the Prussian, French, British, Austrian and Dutch armies (Bayley 1977, p. 101; Thomson 1990, p. 24; McCormack 1993). The German states by this time had become major suppliers of mercenaries throughout Europe (Thomson 1990, p. 24; Bayley 1977; Childs 1982). The Dutch army was led almost entirely by officers from Germany, France, Scotland and Ireland (Childs 1982, pp. 37-38) while Great Britain recruited mercenaries from the German states, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Albania, France and the Italian states (Bayley 1977, pp. 7-10; Thomson 1990, p. 25). The French army, according to Childs (1982, p. 47), possessed nine regiments of Swiss soldiers, six from the German states, six from Ireland and two from the Italian principalities. Scottish and German officers were employed as far east as Russia (Childs 1982, p. 38) where one third of the officer corps was foreign (Duffy 1981 cited in Thomson 1990, p. 26). Eighteenth-century Europe represents an era when mercenary soldiers were legitimately and openly recruited by international powers.

**The State, Citizen Armies and Mercenarism**

The 19th Century marked a significant transition from multinational armies to the citizen-army. Consequently, the legitimacy and practise of normative mercenarism declined (Kiernan 1957; Mockler 1987; Thomson 1990; Percy 2007a). States no longer approved other states directly recruiting private soldiers within their territories, nor provided troops for commercial purposes or allowed their citizens to join foreign armies (Thomson 1990, p. 31). In 1870 the British Parliament passed the *Foreign Enlistment Act* aimed at regulating the mercenary activities of British citizens serving outside Britain’s military. The shift from mercenary forces employed by individual European princes to citizen armies has been traced back to the reconfiguration of
European warfare in the years following the French Revolution in 1789 (Percy 2007a). Reasons for this change are multifarious and moot (Posen 1993; Thomson 1994; Avant 2000; Percy 2007a).

Thomson (1990, p. 26) misleadingly suggests the last instance in which a European state raised an army of foreigners was in 1854 when Britain hired 16,500 Italians, Swiss and German mercenaries for the Crimean war. However, Britain has to this day continued to employ a regiment of Gurkha soldiers from Nepal while France continues to recruit foreign nationals into the French Foreign Legion. The 19th Century also marked a period when foreign soldiers started to be employed outside the European state system. Six thousand British troops, for instance, were recruited to fight in the Spanish American Wars of Independence (Taylor 1986; Thomson 1990, p 26). In 1830 Brazil hired Irish and German mercenaries to fight in their war against Argentina (Thomson 1990, p. 26), while in 1853 Mexican president Lopez de Santa Anna hired German mercenaries in an attempt to stave off an impending coup d’état (Bayley 1977, pp. 145-148).

The 20th Century army, in contrast to 18th Century forces, were composed primarily of citizen soldiers and officers under exclusive authority of the home state. This change was accentuated by the nationalism that emerged during World War I and II eras, in which citizens en masse volunteered and fought in their countries’ armed forces. However, foreigners have continued to be employed in 20th Century armies. Take for instance French officers who continued to serve in Cameroon or Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast) after independence; Spanish troops recruited into the Portuguese army; Greeks serving in Cyprus’s army; and Ghana, whereby soldiers have been recruited from neighbouring francophone states; Pakistani officers employed in different formations of the Saudi Arabian, Libyan and Bahraini armed forces; or Australian and British citizens who served in apartheid South Africa’s army during the late 1970s and 1980s; and New Zealand citizens currently serving in the armed forces of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

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45 Thomson (1990) notes that none of these troops actually engaged in combat as the war had ended before they arrived at the battlefront.
46 The French Foreign Legion is unique military unit of the French army that recruits foreign citizens. Recruitment of foreigners into the French Foreign Legion and Britain’s employment of soldiers from Nepal blur the lines between lawful recruitment and illicit mercenarism. It is, in essence, a legal practise of mercenary recruitment. This remains debated in the literature. See, for instance, Mockler (1987, pp. 19-33); Thomson (1990, pp. 27-28); Nossal (1998, p. 20); Singer (2003, pp. 41-42); Percy (2003, p. 728); and Trundle (2008, p. 25).
Mercenaries and the End of Empire

On 15 July 1950, the German Political Department of the British Foreign Office obtained a copy of an article published in the German newspaper *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, providing details of German mercenaries who were serving in foreign armies.\(^{47}\) The article estimated the total number at 100,000 suggesting that a tradition from the 18th Century has survived whereby Germans were fighting for every kind of government and sometimes against each other. It claimed that veterans of Rommel’s *Afrika Korps* were serving in the Middle East including 6,000 soldiers who were serving in the Egyptian army, 4,000 in Syria and 2,000 in Iraq, while over 30,000 had joined the French Foreign Legion. Furthermore, the article “German Soldiers Everywhere” that appeared in the *The Guardian* on 25 July 1950 claimed that after World War II former SS troops had fought in Russia, Greece, Albania and China and 8,000 German soldiers were serving in the army of Mao Tse-Tung.\(^{48}\)

Following the defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War and the subsequent abolition of the Werhmacht (the German national army which was later restored as the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Germany) a market for experienced German mercenaries emerged. These soldiers were, as the evidence suggests, recruited into various foreign militaries.

By the mid 20th Century the use of private force had been restricted by an international “norm” against mercenaries (Percy 2007a).\(^{49}\) Yet the lines between legitimate nation-state armies and illicit mercenary recruiting had become increasingly blurred by cases such as the large numbers of foreigners who served in the Spanish civil war,\(^{50}\) the French Foreign Legion that continues to recruit foreign citizens without consent of the individual’s home state and Gurkha soldiers from Nepal who continue to be actively recruited and employed by the British, Indian and

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\(^{49}\) Percy (2007) argues that the use of private force has been restricted by a “norm” against mercenaries on two levels. First, they are considered immoral for using force outside legitimate channels. Second, they are morally problematic because they fight for selfish, financial reasons as opposed to a larger conception of the common good.

\(^{50}\) Foreign volunteer forces were recruited to serve in the Spanish civil war. This included 40,000 volunteers from some 50 countries who fought in defence of the Spanish Republic (Keene 2007, p. vi). Men from Germany, Italy and Portugal were sent to fight in the ranks of Franco’s army. There were also 1000 to 1500 English, Irish, French, Russian, and Romanian men who joined Franco’s forces (see Keene 2007).
Royal Bruneian armies. This is also evident in the case of former British military personnel who, with tacit approval of the UK government, were lucratively employed by the Sultan of Oman to serve in his armed forces. Estimates suggest that about 200 British soldiers fought against guerrillas in Dhofar during an insurrection in 1965 (Burchett & Roebuck 1977, p. 167).

By the early 1960s soldiers from western industrialised countries were being hired by governments of recently decolonised states or rebel groups to fight in civil wars or independence struggles. Nossal (1998) refers to these soldiers as “vagabond” mercenaries. Thomson (1990) has, more appropriately, termed these \textit{ad hoc} mercenary forces. She argues that foreigners were employed for their specialist expertise in unconventional warfare, for their technical skills or to boost shortages of military personnel in relatively small African armies. According to Thomson (1990, p. 30), 20\textsuperscript{th} Century \textit{ad hoc} mercenaries have been present in the Congo, Yemen, Nigeria, the Comoros,\textsuperscript{51} Angola, Rhodesia, and Vietnam. Africa has been the site for some of the most publicised cases of \textit{ad hoc} mercenarism and these are the focus of this ethnography.

\textbf{The Emergence of Neo-liberal Mercenarism}

The 20\textsuperscript{th} Century saw the sudden rise of Private Military Companies (PMCs) as a new and neo-liberal form of mercenarism. This shows that the eras of \textit{ad hoc} and neo-liberal mercenarism have overlapped. They are characterised by continuities and changes between these two periods. For two centuries military forces had been the exclusive domain of the state, but as early as 1970 security started shifting into the hands of private actors and organisations beyond \textit{ad hoc} mercenarism. Historically, the state’s monopoly over the control of violence is, as Thompson (1994) remarks, the exception rather than the rule. Explanations for the emergence of the private military industry in the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century start with the end of the Cold War (Nossal 1998; Mills & Stremlau 1999; Singer 2001; Mandel 2002; Avant 2005; Abrahamsen & Williams

\textsuperscript{51}The European mercenaries who were active in the Comoros Islands fall outside the scope of this research. Mercenaries were in 1978 employed by political opponents to conduct a military coup that overthrew the legitimate government of the Comoros Islands. Three years later they were reemployed this time to enact a successful counter-coup (Mockler 1987; Tickler 1987; Rogers 1998).
Abrahamsen & Williams (2007) argue it was military downsizing that resulted from the end of super power rivalries coupled with neo-liberal economic models of governance that created spaces for the legitimate use of private security.

By exploiting free-market principles as early as the late 1960s, fledgling PMCs began offering more advanced military services to an international clientele that included governments and private enterprises. As legitimate corporate entities, PMCs recruited experienced and specialised multinational military personnel who had previously served in state armies. In Britain David Stirling (founder of the SAS) and his business associates formed the first officially recognised PMC in 1967. Stirling’s Watchguard International Ltd employed former Special Forces personnel from Britain to train, for suitable sums of money, the militaries of Middle Eastern rulers (Burchett & Roebuck 1977; Nossal 1998; Spearin 2006). Colonel Stirling described Watchguard International as “a profit-making, private commercial enterprise which moreover works for foreign governments” (cited in Burchett & Roebuck 1977, p. 166). Watchguard International charted the way for larger, transnational military corporations that offered a diverse range of military and security services to other multinationals or governments. By the 1990s Executive Outcomes (EO) of South Africa – a firm which exploited a large labour pool of veteran apartheid-era soldiers – and Sandline International of Great Britain had successfully captured the growing market for private military services (see Shearer 1998; Pech 1999; Musah & Fayemi 2000; Singer 2003; Abrahamsen & Williams 2007). Both these PMCs undertook contentious combative roles in Africa, the most widely publicised being events in Sierra Leone (see Douglas 1999; Hirsch 2001) and Angola (see Cleary 1999; Hooper 2003). Arguably 20th Century PMCs laid the foundations for what has evolved into today’s lucrative multi-billion dollar private security industry. Indeed, PMCs have further complicated conventional understandings and definitions of mercenarism. The relationship between the private military sector and nation-states remains, albeit legitimate, contentious.

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52 Despite David Stirling’s persistent denial, Burchett & Roebuck (1977) have argued that Watchguard International, through Stirling’s close ties with the British SAS, was a private branch of the British army.

53 It remains unclear whether PMCs represent a contemporary shift in the wider historical trajectory of mercenarism or whether they emerged as parallel neo-liberal phenomenon. This moot point was raised by Andrew Bearpark, the Director General of the British Association of Private Security Companies (BAPSC) in a personal interview on 17 June 2010 (permission to use name granted). The extensiveness of this issue deserves its own thesis. Indeed, such an enquiry would contribute much needed knowledge to wider understandings and debates surrounding the origins of the private security industry.
Part Two: Mercenaries, the “Winds of Change” and War

On Monday September 15, 1884, The Times of Britain featured an article on page eight titled “The Scramble for Africa” which detailed the first official stages of the European colonisation of Africa. By 1900 almost the entire continent had been carved up into territories and taken over as colonies of Europe irrespective of ethnic or cultural diversity (Falola 2002). Throughout the 20th Century practices of colonialism varied (see Adu Boahen 1985). King Leopold of Belgium, for example, brutally governed the Congo as his personal fiefdom until 1908 (Gondola 2002), while Britain implemented a policy of indirect rule in Nigeria (Oyebade 2003). Both Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Kenya became white minority settler states under British rule (see Elkins & Pedersen 2005). France, meanwhile, imposed a more centralised authority throughout its colonies (Le Vine 2004). These diverse methods of imperial administration led to virtually every colony being a “jerrybuilt administrative structure that was the product of ad hoc decisions resulting from the many unexpected

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54 Set against a backdrop of intense competition to colonise Africa, the seven imperial powers of Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, France and Britain agreed at the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference to respect each other’s newly acquired spheres of influence (Davidson 1984a; Birmingham 1995; Falola 2002). The European “scramble for Africa” was an historical moment that had a profound impact on the course of African history. By 1901 the African “share out” was more or less complete. Over 28 million square kilometres had been partitioned, conquered and effectively occupied by the seven European powers (Uzoigwe 1985, p. 19). Britain acquired vast territories throughout the continent. These included the agriculturally fertile lands south of the Equator, pockets in the West, and Africa’s large Eastern shoulder excluding Ethiopia. The French took most of North and West Africa that were enormous, but sparsely populated geographical territories. Italy seized Libya in the North, and Eritrea and Somaliland on the Eastern horn. Germany, in a concerted effort not to miss the scramble for Africa invaded Cameroon, Togo, South West Africa (Namibia) and what became German East Africa (Tanzania). Portugal annexed Angola and Mozambique while consolidating prior colonial holdings in Guinea-Bissau and various islands in the Atlantic Ocean (São Tomé & Príncipe, and Cape Verde). King Leopold of Belgium gained possession of a huge landmass in central Africa known as the ‘Congo Free State.’ Having brutally misgoverned the Congo it was handed over to the Belgian state in 1908 (Davidson 1984a). Spain consolidated its small territories in Northern and Western Africa (Spanish Morocco, Rio de Oro, Ifni and Spanish Guinea [Equatorial Guinea]) (Johnston 1899).

55 The reasons for colonising Africa were multifarious at the time and have remained so ever since. Irrespective of whether it was military strength, colonial rivalry or commercial enterprise, they all fashioned the conditions for conflict decades later (Fieldhouse 1981, 1986; Davidson 1984a; Adu Boahen 1985; Birmingham 1995; Iliefe 1995; Falola 2002; Collins & Burns 2007). Moreover, the carving up of Africa, despite the seeming consensus achieved between European powers in Berlin, did not create a set of uniform colonies resembling each other. Political demarcations were drawn up which divided many pre-existing polities and ethnic groups. The partition of Africa, Collins and Burns (2007, p. 297) show, “insured that few colonies would have a linguistically homogenous population and guaranteed that most would contain an array of ethnically diverse peoples.” European colonisation had, in essence, rapidly reconfigured political boundaries, power relations, authority, and economic practises in Africa.
challenges of ruling vast regions of the African continent” (Collins & Burns 2007, p. 298).

Yet this system of colonial rule was to last little more than 60 years. Due to crippling economic exploitation of people and places, oppression of indigenous majorities (through legislation that protected the interests of Europeans, and coercive regimes enforcing colonial authority), Africans demanded political equality and ultimately independence. Growing pressure from African nationalism, decolonisation in Asia and the 1941 Atlantic Charter (that promised “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they live” [cited in Davidson 1984a, p. 218]),\(^5^6\) eventually led to the first stages of the decolonisation of Africa. A tide of decolonisation surged over Africa as early as 1956.\(^5^7\) In 1960, 16 African countries gained independence (Birmingham 1995, pp. 93-98). Between 1961 and 1974, 20 more African colonies became independent (Birmingham 1995, pp. 93-98). As colonial powers began their rapid exodus from Africa a climate of political uncertainty, fragility and instability engulfed the continent. Even though systems of European colonialism seemed firmly in place in the first quarter of the twentieth-century, and advocates for imperial governance suggested they would last for centuries, by 1980, formal European rule had evaporated in Africa.\(^5^8\)

One of the most profound legacies left by colonialism in Africa were the militaries formed at independence, which quickly became active in politics. From 1960 to 1966 there were military coups and army mutinies in at least 14 African countries and by 1975, 21 states had come under direct military rule (Falola 2002, p. 246). Internal power struggles became increasingly determined by military intervention fuelling violence across the continent. Between 1960 and 1980, large-
scale conflicts flared up in the Congo, Nigeria, Mozambique, Angola, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and South West Africa (Namibia) – all in sub-Saharan Africa. The only other large-scale conflict north of the Sahara was in Algeria where French settlers fought a futile but brutal war against Algerian nationalists, claiming the lives of almost one million people (Birmingham 1995, p. 22). Although these violent struggles were staged in separate locales, different environments of warfare\(^{59}\) and influenced by localised issues they were all entwined in an intricate global web of decolonisation, racial politics and Cold War rivalries. These three political processes provide the thematic framework for the second part of this chapter. In doing so, it explores Africa’s conflicts as complex spaces that cultivated shadowed cultures of mercenary soldiering.

**Politics of Decolonisation: the end of empire and the contestation of internal rule**

When colonial overlords decided to depart Africa and relinquish power to their colonies they did so with varying levels of preparation, from gradual constitutional development (for example, in Botswana) through to outright haste (for example, in Congo and Guinea). In certain cases the politics of this withdrawal coupled with internal power struggles led to wide-scale conflict that attracted mercenaries from abroad. For instance, the Belgian government began pulling out of the Congo (later renamed Zaire in 1971 and the Democratic Republic of the Congo after 1997) in January 1960 and by June 1960 Brussels had granted full independence (De Witte 2001; Haskin 2005; Gondola 2002). The resulting “Congo Crisis” was a period of violence fuelled by a messy entanglement of domestic power struggles, secession (Katanga and Kasai), commercial competition (natural resources), international military intervention (Belgium, the UN and white western mercenaries) and wider global political currents (Cold War rivalries) (see Young 1984, pp. 722-730).

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\(^{59}\) Many of the conflicts over this period varied between conventional and guerrilla warfare. Take for example guerrilla tactics employed by nationalist dissidents in Southern Rhodesia and South West Africa (Namibia). In contrast, the Nigerian Civil War was fought with more conventional means involving two standing armies engaging in violent confrontations.
Crisis in the Congo

This fleetingly tumultuous period in the Congo’s history coincided with the first widely publicised arrival of mercenaries onto the African continent. A few days after independence in the Congo on 30 June 1960, the country’s richest province, Katanga began a war of secession. The self-proclaimed anti-communist president of Katanga Moïse Tshombe, employed an eclectic band of 500 foreign (primarily European) mercenary soldiers, led by Frenchman Christian Tavernier, Belgian Jaques Schramme and Irish/South African Mike Hoare, to bolster his army of Kantangese gendarmes in their fight against the Congolese National Army (Clarke 1968; Mockler 1987; Tickler 1987; Gleijeses 1994; Hoare 1989, 2008; Rogers 1998; Arnold 1999; Musah & Fayemi 2000; Geraghty 2007). On 14 July 1960 the UN militarily intervened in the Congo to “provide military assistance” to Congolese forces to allow the government to “meet fully their tasks” (United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) 2001). In September and December 1961 and again one year later in December 1962 mercenaries violently clashed with the UN security force. It was not until 1963, after Katanga had been reintegrated into the national territory of the Congo that foreign mercenaries ceased military operations and a phasing out of the UN security force had begun (Hempstone 1962; Clarke 1968; Mockler 1987; Gleijeses 1994).

In early 1964 violence once again flared up in the Congo as supporters of the assassinated former Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba started to revolt.60 Then, on 26 June 1964, after returning from self imposed exile in Spain, Moïse Tshombe was appointed by the then President Joseph Kasavubu, as the new Prime Minister of the Congo.61 As the rebellion escalated, and supported by the US and its Cold War allies, Tshombe once again called upon the services of foreign mercenaries – this time to fight with the Congolese National Army in suppressing the Simba rebels (Gleijeses 1994). An intelligence report to the British Consulate-General in Luanda on 27 December 1963 had enquired whether “Tshombe, with Rhodesian and Portuguese

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60 Patrice Lumumba, the first legally recognised Prime Minister of the Congo, was assassinated on 17 January 1961. The assassination was a result of interrelated plots by the American and Belgian governments, who used the Congolese army and a Belgian execution squad (De Witte 2001). The covert American and Belgian assassination was in response to Lumumba’s socialist leanings and his determination to keep the Congo’s vast natural resources under state control.

61 For more depth and insight into the wider political circumstances surrounding Tshombe’s dramatic rise to power after his return from Spain see Gleijeses (1994).
help, may be organising a force of ex-mercenaries." By 6 March 1964 another report confirmed, "the only hard information we have been able to obtain here is that there were... 20 to 30 mercenaries in the Luso area." By August 1964 over 100 mercenaries flowed into the Congo from Rhodesia and South Africa (Hempstone 1962; Clarke 1968; Mockler 1987; Gleijeses 1994) where they had been openly recruited through advertisements placed in local newspapers like the one that appeared in the Johannesburg Star on 4 September 1964. It read:

Any fit young man looking for employment with a difference at a salary well in excess of £100 per month should telephone 838-5202/3 during business hours. Employment initially offered for 6 months. Immediate start (The Congo: Help Wanted. Time Magazine 1964).

Gleijeses (1994, p. 217) reveals that by October of that year the number of mercenaries in the Congo reached over 1000. Led by men such as Mike Hoare and Bob Denard, these mercenary forces were made up of British, French, Portuguese, German, Italian, Belgian, Irish, Rhodesian, South African, American, Canadian and Australian nationals. Thrust into the international spotlight, especially for their excess violence, robberies, lootings (see Gleijeses 1994, pp. 218-217) and subsequent mutinies (see Clarke 1968, pp. 68-78), these foreign soldiers once again played a controversial role in the Congo’s internal political conflict. Their actions demonstrated to the world that Africa had, by the 1960s, become a hotbed for mercenary intervention.

**Nigeria and the Secession of Biafra**

The Nigerian civil war was another brutal conflict that presented a market for mercenaries during the late 1960s. The conflict was fought between the federal...
government of Nigeria and the secessionist territory of Biafra in the oil rich provinces of the South East. The 30-month conflict, which attracted covert foreign intervention, cost almost one million people their lives due to violence, disease and widespread famine (Meredith 2005, p. 204). The former colonial powers of Britain and France, determined to retain (and in France’s case expand), their spheres of influence in Africa, “backed rival military factions in the hope of winning long-term strategic benefits” (Birmingham 1995, p. 34). As the war escalated international intervention became increasingly messy. The Soviet Union, anticipating long-term oil benefits, abandoned its posture of non-involvement in Nigerian affairs and openly backed the federalists (Aluko 1971). Portugal, joining France, also waded into the conflict and covertly supported Biafran secession (Akuchu 1977; Diamond 2007; Ojeleye 2010). Evidently, Britain had used its diplomatic postings in Lagos and Paris to gather intelligence on the French and Portuguese support for Biafra. A telegram to the FCO dated 9 December 1969 from Lagos reported that “Portuguese complicity with the Nigerian Rebels was officially confirmed. Portugal has now been confirmed as one of the centres for activities for the procurement of aircraft and recruitment of personnel for the Nigerian rebels [Biafran armed forces].” Yet at no stage had France or Portugal officially recognised Biafra.

It was not only nation states that were intervening in Nigeria’s Civil War. So too were private military personnel. Mercenary involvement on both sides of the conflict received increasing media and government attention. On 11 August 1968 the News of the World published a two-page article about a British fighter pilot who confessed his role as a “mercenary” who “went into combat against the hard-pressed Biafrans.” There was also an article in the Daily Express on 17 December 1968 reporting that “[A]t least two young British mercenary pilots are flying Russian-built MiG jet fighters against Biafra for the Federal Nigerian Air Force.”

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68 The only countries to formally recognise Biafra were Gabon, Haiti, Côte d’Ivoire, Tanzania and Zambia.
Biafra had also recruited foreign soldiers to boost their war effort. These included French, Belgian, South African, German, British, Italian, Rhodesian, Portuguese and Swedish nationals (see Mockler 1987; Tickler 1987; Arnold 1999). By 1968 the British government had grown increasingly concerned at the “mercenary problem” in Nigeria. Drawing on information obtained from the US Embassy, a British diplomat in Lagos urgently reported to London that there were now “40 French mercenaries in Biafra and that 14 more had flown in from Libreville [Gabon] on 4 October [1967].”\footnote{Tele. No. 1714, D. Hunt to FCO, “Following from US Embassy Sources”, 10 Oct. 1968, FCO 38/290, BNA, Kew, London.} As the Nigerian civil war had intensified in conflict over the two and a half years (July 1967-January 1970) shadow spaces had emerged where mercenaries could operate.

Portuguese Colonies and Armed Revolutions

As was the case in the Congo and Nigeria, the politics of decolonisation also proved defining in the widespread violence that enveloped the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola during the 1960s through into the 1980s. Governed under the three-decade dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, Portugal responded to decolonisation by declaring that all of its colonies were integral parts of Portugal (Davidson 1984b; Macqueen 1997). By 1960 this policy was met with military resistance in Angola from two revolutionary organisations: Soviet backed, The People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the US supported National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA). In 1966 both military groups were joined by The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), initially supported by the Chinese (see Shinn 2008). In Mozambique, the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO), with Soviet support, launched a military campaign against the Portuguese in 1964.

As these armed revolutionary movements made steady progress, Portugal came under crippling military, financial and international pressures. By 1970 the Portuguese government had committed a staggering 282,000 troops and 45.9 per cent of government expenditure to fighting multiple African liberation groups on several fronts (Bermeo 2007, p. 392). This brought the country to the verge of bankruptcy and contributed to swelling discontent against Salazar’s corporatist Estado Novo (New
State). Eighteen months after Salazar’s death his successor, Marcello Caetano was overthrown in a popular revolution by the military. Led by General Spinola the 500-year-old Portuguese empire collapsed within a matter of months (Davidson 1984b; Macqueen 1997). The end of colonial rule in Mozambique and Angola was not however, the end of civil war. According to Wilson (1994, p. 187) the Portuguese withdrawal was chaotic, “all the complex machinery of a modern state was simply abandoned as administrators, managers and settlers left their offices unmanned.” In both countries, an explosive mix of internal power contestations and foreign intervention led to a new wave of political violence.

The civil conflicts that consumed both countries during the 1970s and 1980s attracted the involvement of foreign military personnel who worked in various capacities. In Mozambique, independence quickly led to Civil War. The white minority regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia, in pre-emptive measures to protect their borders and stem the flow of growing isolation, backed the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) who challenged the ruling FRELIMO (see Steenkamp 1989; Hall 1990; Morgan 1990; Young 1990; Moorcraft & McLaughlin 2010). As the Rhodesian and South African militaries became more aggressively involved in Mozambique in the late 1970s and early 1980s, so too did the number of foreign military personnel who came from outside Africa. Foreign nationals serving in both the South African Defence Force (SADF) and Rhodesian military were amongst those who were deployed in the region on aggressive cross border raids. For instance, in his autobiography, former British mercenary Peter McAleese (1993), who served in the Rhodesian SAS during the bush war, recalls being part of one of these raids into Mozambique targeting nationalist guerrilla training camps.

The civil war in Angola fought between the ruling Marxist MPLA and rebel movements FNLA and UNITA, became a much more prevalent and exposed conflict not only as a result of overt foreign intervention (including South Africa’s aggressive cross-border attacks), but also the illicit activities of mercenaries. This included the recruitment of predominantly British and US nationals who formed a disordered mercenary force that went to Angola and fought a brutal and reckless campaign for

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the FNLA against the governing MPLA. The recruitment, actions and subsequent June 1976 trial of 13 mercenaries gained international media attention. Amidst widespread outcry and condemnation in Britain and the international community the mercenaries in Angola had become a diplomatic thorn in the side of the British government. This is evident from the anxiety and uncertainty garnered in British official records. Events in Angola have proved to be one of the more widely publicised and high profile mercenary interventions in Africa during the 1970s. The civil wars that broke out in both Mozambique and Angola following the collapse of the Portuguese empire had attracted various forms of mercenary involvement.

Politics of Race: Conflicts of settlement and resistance to white minority rule

The politics of decolonisation was entwined with the politics of ‘race.’ The white settler colonies in sub-Saharan Africa became riven with internal conflicts defined predominantly by racial politics. As European empires expanded over Africa settlement became a crucial part of colonialism in countries that were conducive to it. European settlers aimed to make Africa their permanent home while continuing to enjoy metropolitan living standards and political privilege (Denoon 1979; Memmi 1991; Elkins & Pedersen 2005). It was, as Elkins and Pederson (2005) argue, political and cultural autonomy that differentiated white settler colonies from other African territories. In Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), for instance, settlers were granted or able to claim considerable power within the local state. In many instances Britain treated Rhodesia as if it were a Dominion like Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) rather than a colony. In many respects Rhodesia had all the trappings of an independent country rather than a colony. However, power had been condensed to a minority of white elites at the exclusion of indigenous Africans (Bratton 1979, 1980; Denoon 1979, 1983; Weitzer 1990; Elkins & Pedersen 2005).

73 For an in-depth critical account of the Angolan Mercenaries see Burchett & Roebuck (1977). Former British freelance soldier Peter McAleese (1993) provides a detailed account of his role fighting as a mercenary in the conflict.
Yet political, economic and social privileges did not go uncontested. Black majorities in settler colonies, inspired by a wave of African decolonisation, began to advocate against white rule and sought political representation and power for themselves. At first this was done through constitutional means but when this failed the politically active Africans resorted to armed resistance. As black dissent grew so too did the force at which white settler governments countered it. This left settler colonies fragile and volatile. From the 1950s through to the 1970s states such as Kenya and Southern Rhodesia became violent zones of racially contested power.

After Kenya’s independence in 1963, Britain’s policy towards its African territories dramatically changed in the wake of British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan’s famous “Winds of Change” speech delivered to the parliament of South Africa on 3 February 1960 in Cape Town (Birmingham 1995, p. 58). The progressive Conservative controlled British Government intended to grant independence to its colonies and support black majority rule (Horowitz 1970; Birmingham 1995; Ovendale 1995). This policy of decolonisation had immense implications for European settlers living in Rhodesia that consequently shaped the ensuing civil war.

The land locked settler colony of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe since 1980) was engulfed in a storm of civil war that spanned from 1971 to 1979. The origins of the Rhodesian civil war can be traced to 19th Century colonisation of the region when white European settlers expropriated vast areas of agriculturally productive land. James Mutambirwa (1980) argues that by 1909 it was in fact the settlers and not the British South Africa Company (BSAC) or the British government who determined the political future of the country. Having been granted internal self-rule by Britain in 1923, white settlers claimed constitutional privileges to the exclusion of the black indigenous majority (Birmingham 1995; Brecher & Wilkenfeld 1997). By the 1960s the structure and social fabric of Rhodesia had become systemically racialised while the political situation had grown significantly volatile. Considering the black majority of Rhodesia had limited constitutional rights, the conservative Rhodesian Front

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75 The Labour governments of 1945–1951 had started a process of decolonisation but this policy had been halted by Conservative governments from 1951 until Prime Minister Harold MacMillan officially implemented a policy of decolonisation in Africa in 1960 (see Ovendale 1995).
76 In the context of this project I will refer to the country that is now Zimbabwe as Rhodesia. This follows established historical conventions.
77 The British South African Company (BSAC) was established by Cecil Rhodes and in 1889 received a royal charter for the exploration of minerals in Southern Africa. The BSAC occupation of Rhodesia also introduced the first European settlers to the area (see Mutambirwa 1980, p. 1-31).
government was elected in December 1962, by the white electorate. This was a reflection of the concerted effort by whites to protect their racially demarcated privileges amidst a wave of African liberation sweeping over the continent.

In 1965 the leader of the Rhodesian Front and Prime Minister of Rhodesia, Ian Smith, issued a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain in an attempt to block the implementation of the UK government’s policy that supported black majority rule and decolonisation in Africa (see Good 1973; Martin 1980). Many of the 250,000 white Rhodesians who in 1965 made up only 5.2 percent of the total population felt betrayed and abandoned by Britain. These sentiments and a growing threat from indigenous political groups advocating black majority rule coupled with land ownership reform further fuelled the determination of white’s to retain power.

With the UDI hostilities between white minorities and black nationalists increased. Although racial segregation was not entirely institutionalised, the contours of ‘race’ were however, configured through patterns of political, social and economic exclusion of indigenous Africans. The Smith government, when faced with a surge of African unrest, grew more authoritarian, militaristic and interventionist (Martin & Johnson 1981). By 1971 the two main African political organisations struggling against the government for majority rule in Rhodesia, the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), began an armed guerrilla insurgency through their paramilitary offshoots, attacking white Rhodesians, government security forces, and farms (Kohn 2007, pp. 439-440). In response the government launched a war effort deploying a professional military, including regular army, reservists and elite Special Forces, and an air force, which included fixed wing carriers, jet aircrafts and helicopters. The British South Africa Police (BSAP) was also used to provide armed support to the Rhodesian Security Forces.

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78 Between 1948 and 1965 the white population of Rhodesia had trebled (White 2004, p. 103). In 1965 the population of white settlers in Southern Rhodesia was 250,000 out of a total of 4,818,000 people (Schutz 1973, p. 21).
79 Land ownership was a primary issue in the messy political struggles between white and indigenous people in Rhodesia (see Christopher 1983; Palmer 1990; Shaw 2003).
80 The paramilitary wing of the ZAPU was the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and ZANU’s was the Zimbabwe National Liberation Army (ZANLA).
81 Comprehensive detail on the Rhodesian Security Forces military campaign and hardware during the Rhodesian bush war can be found in Binda (2007).
82 The British South Africa Police (BSAP) was the police force of the BSAC and had subsequently carried over to become the national police force of Rhodesia.
As violence from both sides intensified, and the conflict evolved into full-scale civil war, the Smith government introduced compulsory military service (conscription) upon white males aged between 18 to eventually 60 years (White 2004). Yet not all white Rhodesians agreed with these policies, as one Rhodesian war veteran recalls in his memoirs:

I could personally see the injustice of white supremacy… By this time I also realised that it was unjust that by reason of skin colour a race should automatically be third class citizens…but we were left with no option but to fight and hope for eventual settlement.83

More proactive white dissent came from those who fled Rhodesia to escape military conscription and the escalating violence (White 2004). Alongside white and black Rhodesian nationals being recruited into the government forces were foreign volunteers who came from Britain, Ireland, South Africa, France, Portugal, Israel, Italy, Canada, United States of America, New Zealand and Australia to support the Smith government in its war effort.84 A full-page advertisement on the back cover of the November 1977 issue of the international Soldier of Fortune85 magazine had, for instance, attracted foreign nationals who volunteered to fight in the Rhodesian security forces.

One former soldier who had previously served in the New Zealand army explained to me that it was through an article in a 1977 issue of the Soldier of Fortune magazine that he had applied to join the Rhodesian army. “I was in a local dairy right, and that’s when I found the Soldier of Fortune magazine on the shelf, I see the ad and think shit this is the go” he enthusiastically recalled (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). The former RLI soldier described how the article, written by an ex-Vietnam veteran who was serving in one of the Africa n units, “happened to have some recruiting information” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

83 Anonymous memoirs obtained by the researcher through personal correspondence.
84 Evidence of foreign volunteers serving in the Rhodesian security forces during the Rhodesian bush war can be found in multiple sources. See for instance, Arnold (1999) and Rogers (1998). From their own subjective experiences of serving in the Rhodesian army during the bush war, the majority of participants I interviewed for this research told me of other men from foreign countries that they had personally served alongside. Therefore, I have included these nationalities in the above list of volunteers who participated in Rhodesia’s civil war.
85 Soldier of Fortune is billed as the “[J]ournal of professional adventurers.” It is a monthly periodical magazine dedicated to the world wide reporting of wars with an international readership. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Brown, an American citizen and former Special Forces serviceman, founded Soldier of Fortune magazine. It is, to date (2011), still in publication both in print and online. The magazine, due to its extensive coverage of conflict in Africa during the late 1970s and 1980s, provides an historical connection between Africa and mercenaries.
According to his accounts the decision to fight in the Rhodesian civil war was a relatively straightforward process:

I showed it to my mate who served in the Australian army, regular force, and said ‘what do you reckon?’ He said we should apply. We wrote away for it and he got straight in because he had a discharge certificate but mine took a little longer and only came through the same day we left Christchurch [for Rhodesia]” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

This reinforces White’s (2004, p. 115) argument that most foreign soldiers who went to fight in Rhodesia did so as individuals and were made aware of such opportunities “through ads in military magazines.” An editor of Soldier of Fortune, informed me that “the bulk of the 450 Americans who served in the Rhodesian military got their initial information through SOF [Soldier of Fortune]” (Personal communication, 17 April 2011).

The actual figures for foreign citizens who served in the Rhodesian army and participated in the bush war are, however, difficult to ascertain. White (2004) suggests that the figure most sources cite is 1,500 foreign soldiers. Nonetheless the Rhodesian military were determined to project an image of being strongly opposed to the employment of “mercenaries” per se. Several former Rhodesian soldiers interviewed for this research reiterated this point. A New Zealand man who fought in the Rhodesian army told me a story about how his commanding officer (during his basic training in Salisbury in 1976) became infuriated when he read an article in the Soldier of Fortune magazine about foreign mercenaries serving in Rhodesia (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). This shares synergies with White’s (2004, p. 114) argument that the Rhodesian army “had every reason to dissemble on the question of mercenaries” because they seemed “baffled by the process by which mercenaries were recruited or contracted.”

The British government was at the time aware that British citizens were being recruited into the Rhodesian army. FCO file FCO 36/1872 contains copies of

86 Discrepancies in these figures range from Churchill’s (1980, p. 22) claim that the number of foreign nationals serving in the Rhodesian army was “as high as 50% of the gross combatant strength of the Rhodesian National Army, some 2,000 of these being U.S. imports.” Churchill’s (1980, p. 22) estimates come from the ZANU “as reported by the Southern Africa Anti-Mercenary Coalition, San Francisco, 1979.” The Rhodesian army, however, estimated there were perhaps 1,000 foreign soldiers, of whom 100 were American serving amongst their ranks by 1978 (Lobban 1978).

87 The illicit recruitment of foreign soldiers into the Rhodesian armed forces is explored in greater detail in chapters five and six.
Rhodesian army recruiting documents that were allegedly sent from Salisbury (Harare, the capital) to a former British army officer on 8 March 1976. These included an addressed letter; application form; medical examination form; pay and allowance information sheet; and Rhodesian commodity prices. In a similar way ex-military personnel in Commonwealth countries, such as Australia and New Zealand were also recruited into the Rhodesian army through these methods. “A mate I knew in the New Zealand army told me he was going to join the Rhodesian army. I thought that sounded like a good idea,” a veteran of the Rhodesian bush war told me (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). “That’s the last I thought of it and then my bloody wife rang me up at work and said ‘there’s a bloody ad in the paper wanting immigrants to go to Rhodesia. There’s just a little thingy at the bottom you have to fill out,’” he continued explaining (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). “So she filled it out and they sent us a bunch of forms. We got the forms to immigrate to Rhodesia and it said ‘what do you want to do?’ So I of course joined the army. I duly filled out the rest of the forms and sent them off” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). He then explained that two weeks later Rhodesian authorities had accepted his application informing him he could begin service as a corporal in the Rhodesian army. “So in September 1974 I left New Zealand and arrived in Rhodesia… my wife came out later,” the man in his early sixties said (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). His account reinscribes the way the Smith regime was, at the time, encouraging white members of the Commonwealth to immigrate and settle in Rhodesia to bolster the white settler population, while thousands more were emigrating out of the country (White 2004). The employment of foreign nationals into the Rhodesian security forces blurred the boundaries between legitimate soldiering and illicit mercenary recruiting. Nevertheless the Rhodesian bush war provided opportunities for foreign military personnel to immerse themselves in active zones of conflict.

As the Rhodesian Civil War continued through the 1970s the Smith regime was met with mounting political pressure from the international community. Britain had immediately condemned UDI with verbal protest and, along with the UN, declared Rhodesia an illegal state. In 1965, at the behest of Britain, the UN Security Council imposed an international trade embargo on 90 per cent of Rhodesia’s exports

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88 Scottish Daily Record & Sunday Mail Ltd to Chief Press Relations Officer FCO, 8 March 1976, FCO 36/1872, BNA, Kew, London.
and prohibited the UN’s 122-member nations from selling oil, arms, motor vehicles or aeroplanes to the unrecognised state (see United Nations: Sanctions Against Rhodesia 1966). As a country, it was not recognised by any other nation, even its Portuguese and South African supporters. In accordance with the UN and British foreign policy, the New Zealand government policed its own trade and economic sanctions deeming Rhodesia an “illegal racist minority regime”.89 There were countries that flouted these regulations and continued to trade with Rhodesia using Portuguese controlled Mozambique and South Africa as conduit lines in and out of the country. The collapse of the Portuguese empire in 1974 had a profound effect on Rhodesia as the unrecognised country was cut off from major supply ports in Mozambique.

The strain on the Rhodesian government’s war effort also came from other events during the 1970s. Black nationalists continued to operate effectively from secluded military bases in Zambia and Mozambique. Mathew Preston (2004b) recognises that the morale of white soldiers and the security forces was, by the mid-1970s, slipping and counter-insurgency and cross border raids were losing their effectiveness. The Smith regime was dealt another blow as South Africa in April 1976, announced an end to all financial and military aid to Rhodesia (see Diplomatic Staff 1976, p. 1a). Violence continued from both sides up until 1979. It was not until the “Lancaster House Agreement” was signed on 21 December 1979, that the Rhodesian civil war ended.90 This revoked the UDI and the country was returned to the authority of the British Crown in preparation for independence under black majority rule, which was granted on 18 April 1980 (Preston 2004a).

The Militarisation of Apartheid South Africa

The political, economic and military powerhouse of the continent was led by apartheid South Africa. From the 1960s to 1980s South Africa played a significant role in the various conflicts throughout Southern Africa. While other African nations were disassembling institutionalised racial segregation following the departure of their colonial powers, South Africa was intensifying it through apartheid. As a result


90 By this stage the country had been renamed Zimbabwe Rhodesia.
the white minority government was becoming increasingly challenged by the African National Congress (ANC)\(^{91}\) and neighbouring black independent states. Due to rising internal and external threats to white South African minority rule its government became primarily focused on security and started the rapid militarisation of the state.\(^{92}\)

The SADF grew dramatically in size and influence. Military expenditure rocketed from $US 60 million in 1960 to $US 3 billion in 1982 (Sparks 1991, p. 308) and its fighting strength trebled over this time from 77,500 to 238,400 personnel, a direct result of white conscription (Grundy 1983b, p. 6; Wilson 1984, pp. 309-310; Sparks 1991, p. 308). The apartheid government was determined to use force to protect white economic and social privilege (Sparks 1991). The entanglement of Cold War rivalries and racial politics ultimately shaped South Africa’s foreign policy.\(^{93}\)

**Cold War Rivalries and African Battlegrounds: War by proxy**

Events in Angola following the departure of Portuguese colonial rule reveal the extent to which US and Soviet Union policies became deeply enmeshed in the internal dynamics of Africa’s conflicts. For instance, Augustino Neto, the leader of the Socialist MPLA who declared his party head of the new state (named The Peoples Republic of Angola) and had this move supported by a Cuban-Soviet alliance. This saw the arrival of 20,000 Cuban troops (Lowenthal 1977; George 2005; Meredith

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91 Some factions in the ANC were Soviet backed.
92 For further discussions and analysis surrounding the militarisation of South Africa see Cock and Nathan (1989).
93 As the tide of African liberation encircled the regional superpower, following the collapse of the Portuguese empire in 1974, the apartheid regime began enacting a foreign policy of economic disruption and aggressive military incursions directed at neighbouring states as far north as Angola and into the borders of the Congo. South Africa’s aggressive actions against its neighbouring states provoked international condemnation. The UN Security Council condemned South Africa “for aggression against Angola” demanding Pretoria “desist from using the international territory of Namibia to mount provocative or aggressive acts against Angola or any other African state.” (“Security Council Condemns South Africa for Aggression against Angola”, April 1976, ABHS 7148 Acc. W5503, 307/LONB 69/79/1 1, Archives New Zealand, Wellington).

By the late 1970s and early 1980s South Africa’s border wars had intensified with the SADF conducting large-scale military offensives inside Namibia, Mozambique and Angola. These included events such as “Operation Protea” launched against Angola in August 1981 as vividly recollected by South African paratrooper Granger Korff (2009, p. 250-260; see also Steenkamp 2006; Bernard 2009). Nonetheless, South Africa’s active role in destabilising neighbouring countries helped create markets for mercenaries, as was the case in Angola. The Angolan civil war became largely defined by the active Cold War confrontations between the Soviet Union and America.
According to US government estimates, between March 1975 and January 1976 the Soviet Union provided the MPLA with $US 100-200 million in military aid and 170 ‘advisors’, while Cuba supplied $US 70 million in military aid and 11,400 ‘advisors’ (Stevens 1976, p. 144). Due to their recent defeat in Vietnam, the US “was eager to ‘contain’ the expansion of Soviet influence in Central Africa and began offering extended support to the FNLA and UNITA” (Gilbert & Reynolds 2007, p. 380). In 1975 US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger declared, “[W]e can not ignore, for example, the substantial Soviet build-up of weapons in Angola, which has introduced great power rivalry into Africa for the first time in 15 years” (cited in Weissman 1979, p. 263). With the subsequent collapse of the FNLA in the late 1970s, the US put its weight behind UNITA with covert military aid, directed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (Weissman 1979). The civil conflict that raged in Angola during the 1970s up until the cease-fire in 1989 is a site where “America and the USSR fought a destructive ‘war by proxy’” (Birmingham 1995, p. 7). Fascinatingly, Gilbert and Reynolds (2007, p. 38) draw attention to what they call “a classic case of Cold War irony” during the Angolan’s civil war. As they point out, the oil companies operating in Angola were predominantly American owned, and the money they generated was used to fight against the American backed rebels. The authors then state, “[I]ndeed, the situation eventually became so absurd that Soviet-funded Cuban troops were defending American oil wells from US-backed rebels who sought to deny income to the Socialist MPLA government” (Gilbert & Reynolds 2007, p. 380).

The Cold War rivalries that spilled over into Africa during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s became increasingly complex when they intertwined with the politics of ‘race.’ What is important to note is that communism is an inherently anti-racist and anti-imperialist ideology. Certainly, this appealed to the African liberation movements that eventually spread over the continent (Roberts 1986). The connections between Cold War policies and racial politics becomes evident in the way the white minority regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa used anti-communist discourse to obscure and defend their racially layered domestic policies on the international stage.

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94 For analysis on the reasons behind Cuba’s intervention in Angola see Lowenthal (1977, pp. 3-10) and George (2005).

95 This does not, however, exclude the possibility of racism in practise. For example, discrimination against Jews in the Soviet Union was barely concealed anti-Semitism with significant ‘racial’ undertones (see Korey 1974; Kostyrchenko 1995).
during the 1970s. Bridget Bloom (1976, p. 27), reporting for the *Financial Times*, astutely observed that:

> the South African foray into Angola should be seen for what it was. It is convenient for Pretoria to portray itself as an anti-communist bastion of the “Civilised Christian west” but its prime motive is to preserve White government.

Furthermore, the conservative governments of Rhodesia and South Africa used this ruse to elicit support from the US and their Cold War allies in an attempt to legitimise their aggressive actions against surrounding black Marxist states (South African Democracy Education Trust 2006; Lowry 2007). For instance, on 27 November 1977, reacting to Soviet support of the MPLA in Angola, South African Defence Minister P.W. Botha appealed to Western powers to assist South Africa in preventing “the Soviet Union establishing a permanent foothold in Angola” (Botha cited in Ashford 1975, p. 8). Loaded with Cold War rhetoric he stated, “I would like to see the free world show more direct interest in getting Russia out of Southern Africa” and that “the West is not pulling its weight in confronting the communist threat” (Botha cited in Ashford 1975, p. 8). However, Ashford (1975, p. 8) notes that this came at a time when “South African officials [were] now making little attempt to disguise the fact the country is actively involved in Angola.” Additionally, Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian Smith attacked the West for its “tragic failure” to respond to the Soviet-Cuban intervention in Angola as he “vainly sought to solicit western support in what seemed to him to be so obviously a front line in the Cold War” (Lowry 2007, p. 187). The anti-communist guise employed by both South Africa and Rhodesia became part of the wider context of Cold War propaganda in which foreign soldiers operated.

**Cold War Politics and Military Motivations**

The extent to which the participants in this research were politically motivated to intervene in Africa’s conflicts varied. Discussions with former foreign soldiers now living in New Zealand revealed the ways in which personal biographies and wider political processes intersected during recruitment for military service. Some of the men emphasised how Cold War politics drew them into Africa’s conflicts. Having just sat down after making us a hot cup of tea and armed with a tray of home made biscuits, one former combatant explained to me that his main reason for joining the
mercenary force employed by the Congolese government to suppress the Simba rebellion in the late 1960s was political:

When the bloody problems started in the Congo when the Belgium’s [sic] handed over the Congo and then the troubles started there and obviously it was seen, you know, bloody communists again. My main thing there was on the communism (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

Initially he used a Cold War discourse and anti-communist sentiments to explain his motives for serving in the Congo. Yet as the interview progressed and our topics of discussion moved in and around his motivations he started relating racial politics with Cold War rivalries. He recalled his determination to protect the white settlers who, after Belgium’s rapid decolonisation and the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, had become the targets of Simba reprisals:

The bloody Simbas they started bloody attacking white people and monasteries, started raping nuns and things like that, and I thought it was time for me to give a hand. My motivation was to keep the… well all the people all the nuns and farmers, keep them safe. Because the communist rebels, Lumumba’s Simbas, that’s what they called themselves, keep them at bay… and keep the people alive and keep the commies [communists] out (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

The rationale of this former private soldier resonates with the words of mercenary leader Mike Hoare in his 1984 written account of his involvement in the Congo:

In the event I found myself taking a substantial part in the political life of the Congo and the shaping of the future of that great country. If this experience has taught me anything it is that the battle for Africa is now on, and that the newly independent African states are ill equipped physically and ideologically to fight it. Who knows but that the mercenary soldier – if he measures up to the high standard required – may yet prove to be the only real and positive check to the communist invasion of Africa (Hoare 1984, p. 12).

Such narratives reveal how the ways some former soldiers explained how their entry into the shadows of mercenarism in Africa was a politically motivated decision. Yet, this did not always run consistent with other oral testimonies provided by those combatants I encountered while on fieldwork.

Although declaring there were no political causes behind his decision to leave for the Rhodesian army one New Zealander did recall meeting other foreigner soldiers
who “were there because they were definitely anti-Communist. It wasn’t anti-African or black. It was more West versus…ah…the Russians, the Soviets” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). In a separate interview another man had similar observations during his service in the Rhodesian military. “There were a lot of blokes who actually claimed they are on an anti-communist crusade… Well maybe they were” he continued, “but I certainly wasn’t. I found they were the Americans” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). The journal of the late John Alan Coey, killed in action while serving for the Rhodesian SAS during the bush war, provides a valuable insight to the life of an American citizen who in 1972 left the US Marine Corps’ officer training program for Rhodesia to fight communism and “help sustain European civilization in Africa” (Cohey 1994, p. 9). As a highly conservative Christian, Cohey’s (1994) journal expresses a deep disillusionment with US politics and the government’s failure to stop the spread of communism during the Korean and Vietnam wars which ultimately stirred him into joining the Rhodesian army to defend the “Christian heritage of the West” (Cohey 1994, p. ix). An element of Cohey’s story also reverberates with an official intelligence report that surfaced in the FCO in Britain. There was a force of 300 US volunteer soldiers who travelled from London to Southern Africa on 15 September 1978 to support the Smith regime. “The force of mainly Vietnam War veterans,” the report stated “is claiming… to fight ‘under a Christian flag’ in the war against nationalist guerrillas.”

Amongst the complexities of what motivated these men it is important to consider the extent to which their choices were, at the time, affected in someway by the global political climate. From personal accounts I accessed, both oral and written, it became clear that Cold War rivalries had influenced the majority of western soldiers who decided on their own terms to participate in Africa’s civil conflicts between 1960 and 1980. In the case of Rhodesia, Luise White (2004, p. 117) recognises that foreign soldiers raise questions about what links place and warfare. “Patria is not the issue” she argues, “politics is” (White 2004, p. 117). She states that “politics are utopian: somewhere communism had to be stopped; somewhere men had to stand up against terrorism; somewhere the western world had to stand fast against the eastern hordes” (White 2004, p. 117). Cast amongst an entangled web of the politics of decolonisation,

97 Ibid.
‘race’ and the Cold War, these African conflicts were potent sites for foreign military intervention during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.
Mercenary Voices and Shadowed Contestations

Waiting for him to prepare the cups of tea for us to drink during our interview, I asked politely whether he minded if I looked over his military service medals that were conspicuously mounted on the living room wall. “Yes of course, go for it”, he replied. They were medals awarded to him as a professional soldier in an army, which was party to a major war outside Africa in the late 1960s and 1970s. At a young age I remember being curious about the medals awarded to my Grandfather for his service in World War II. In fact, on appearance these medals were not too dissimilar to my Grandfather’s. My curiosity was momentarily disrupted when he asked whether I took milk and/or sugar in my tea. “Just milk thanks, no sugar” I replied. My attention then shifted to the framed black and white photograph hanging on the wall above his medals. It was a portrait of the former soldier with his young family. He was in full and immaculate military uniform, including a beret. I turned and asked, “When was this taken?” He looked up from the kitchen and across the living room to where my gaze was fixed, “Oh… around 1974 or 75 I think, when I first arrived” he said. The veteran soldier then explained that the photograph was taken in Rhodesia shortly after he and his family had emigrated from New Zealand. He had served four years in the Rhodesian army during the height of the bush war. Nearly 40 years later and now living back in New Zealand, this man rejected and resented being classified as ‘a mercenary.’ His story contested official definitions of mercenarism, resulting in a discrepancy between official records that classify combatants as ‘mercenaries’, and someone who viewed himself as a legitimate soldier serving in the Rhodesian armed forces.

Definitions of mercenarism remain highly contested in the shadows. Although often conceptualised legally the term is politically, socially and culturally contingent. By using the UN Geneva Convention, additional Protocol I, Article 47, as an
international and officially recognised definition of mercenarism, this chapter explores the ways in which former soldiers contest, negotiate and reposition definitional borders of what is and is not a ‘mercenary.’ Instead of being rigid and static (as embodied in official documents) these borders are ambiguous, porous and malleable spaces in which foreign military personnel could move in. For those men who left their countries of origin to fight in Africa’s conflicts during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s the term mercenary is understood through subjective experiences of warfare and wider political processes.

**Multilateral Efforts to Regulate Mercenarism**

International condemnation of mercenarism started to gain traction from 1960 to 1964 when forces of European combatants destabilised the newly independent Congo and fought a series of armed struggles against UN peacekeeping forces in the course of the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC).\(^98\) By the end of the ONUC in 1964, 245 UN military personnel and five civilian staff had lost their lives (United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) 2001). As a result of this violence, illegitimate mercenary activities in Africa had escalated into an international crisis. In response, the UN and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)\(^99\) embarked on an international campaign to bring the practise of mercenarism under stringent international regulations (Musah & Fayemi 2000). As early as 21 February 1961 the UN Security Council urged the immediate withdrawal of all mercenaries from the

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\(^98\) The *Operation des Nations Unis au Congo* (ONUC) was established in July 1960 to assist the Congolese government restore the political independence and territorial integrity of the Congo and to help maintain law and order throughout the country. The function of the ONUC was subsequently modified to prevent the occurrence of civil war and secure the removal of “all foreign military, paramilitary and advisory personnel not under the United Nations command, and all mercenaries” (United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) 2001). On 28 August 1961 the UN launched “Operation Rumpunch” where UN forces started to disarm troops fighting for the secession of Katanga and arrest all foreign mercenaries who formed the core of the Katanga gendarmerie (see *Operation Rumpunch*, 1961, UNDoc. 5/4741).

\(^99\) The Organisation for African Unity (OAU) was established on 25 May 1963, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Thirty-two African governments initially signed the OAU charter. By 1994, 53 out of 54 African states had joined. However, it was disbanded in July 2002 and replaced by the African Union (AU). The OAU was set up to secure and enhance Africa’s political, social and economic future. The general purposes of the OAU were to promote unity and solidarity of the African states; deepen cooperation to achieve a better life for the people’s of Africa; defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence; and act as a collective voice on behalf of the African continent. See History and Present Status, “Organization of African Unity (OAU)/African Union (AU),” 12 February 2004, International Relations and Cooperation, Republic of South Africa, http://www.dfa.gov.za/foreign/Multilateral/africa/oau.htm.
Congo. They called upon “all states to take immediate and energetic measures to prevent the departure of such personnel [mercenaries] for the Congo” and to deny “transit and other facilities to them.”

The UK government promptly acted on this UN resolution. By 1962 the foreign office, along with diplomatic posts in central and southern Africa, began monitoring and making attempts to regulate the movements and actions of British and Commonwealth mercenaries serving in the Congo. A cable from the British consulate in Elisabethville on 2 August 1961, addressed to the West and Central African Department in London, detailed the movements of Allistair Mackie, a white Commonwealth citizen born in Nairobi. Mackie had illegally entered the Congo through Northern Rhodesia and fought as a mercenary for the Katanga Gendarmerie. He was arrested, disarmed and expelled from the Congo by the UN. With the UK’s assistance he was repatriated to Nairobi. In a separate case, on 10 September 1962, B.W. Gordon from the British Embassy in Leopoldville filed a report to the Foreign Office in London concerning two British mercenaries “Sutherland” and “Franklin” who were also arrested by the UN and held in a Katangan prison. The UN allowed Gordon to provide consular assistance to the two captured mercenaries. At 2.30pm he conducted lengthy interviews with the two mercenaries “who were dressed in a type of denim blouse and trousers” and “looked very fit.” Sutherland, the first of the two mercenaries interviewed, told Gordon “there are about 60 to 70 mercenaries in Katanga of whom a dozen are British, Commonwealth or South African.” This seems to have surprised someone reading the report back in London as it had been underlined several times in an effort to emphasise its significance.

By the early 1960s the UN had been applying significant pressure on the government to deal with the rising prevalence of British and Commonwealth mercenaries fighting in the Congo. As a result, British officials in both London and

\[^{102}\text{Embassy Leopold to FO, Telno. 829, “Minutes: Messes. Sutherland and Franklin”, 10 Sept. 1962, FO 317/161535.}\]
\[^{103}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{104}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{105}\text{Rawlings (2011) refers to these annotations on archival papers as the “aesthetics of the subtle”, where colonial administrators (bureaucrats, officials and civil servants) negotiated, debated and contested policies of decolonisation and compliance with attendant human rights regimes. The fact that these annotations are often handwritten, rather than typeset, reinscribes their deliberately marginal but astute observations embodying the affectual stories of the archive.}\]

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Africa were faced with the difficult task of how best to regulate private combatants participating in Africa’s wars whilst protecting national interests abroad.

**International Templates and Mercenary Regulation**

No less than three years after the return of ad hoc mercenary forces to the Congo, the OAU established a special committee on mercenarism in 1967. The *Assembly of Heads of State and Government* in Kinshasa, Congo, declared that mercenaries represent a threat to the “independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and the harmonious developments of its member states” and urged “all states of the world to enact laws declaring the recruitment and training of mercenaries in their territories a punishable crime and deterring their citizens from enlisting as mercenaries.”106 Then, in 1970, maintaining a principled opposition to the presence of mercenaries in Africa, the UN passed a resolution condemning the use of mercenaries against movements of liberation.107 Despite attempting to ‘outlaw’ mercenary activities, this resolution once again placed enforcement exclusively on national governments (Singer 2003). The same year, in response to the 1970 mercenary invasion of Guinea,108 the OAU drafted a convention for the removal of mercenaries from Africa. This was presented in the form of an expert committee report to the 19th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers meeting in June 1972 (Musah & Fayemi 2000, pp. 20-21).

Notwithstanding these international movements aimed at internationally regulating mercenarism during the 1960s and 1970s, the presence of private combatants in Africa continued to escalate. Conflicts in Nigeria, Angola, Rhodesia, Mozambique, and the 1978 mercenary led coup d’état in Comoro Islands, reflected the growing involvement of mercenaries in African affairs. Yet, for the UN and OAU to prohibit mercenary intervention they had to establish a precise definition of mercenarism which member nation states could adopt for their own national legislation. Spearheaded by African states (members of the OAU), the first official and internationally accepted definition of mercenarism was included in the 1977

108 On 22 November 1970 (white) Portuguese-led mercenary forces launched an attack on Guinea. The objectives of the mercenary force were to free Portuguese and Guinean political prisoners held in a Conakry prison and destroy the PAIGC (Guinea Bissau Liberation Movement).
additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. *Article 47 of Protocol 1* states: “A mercenary shall not have the right to be a combatant or prisoner of war.” It then defines a mercenary as any person who:

(a) is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict;

(b) does, in fact, take a direct part in the hostilities;

(c) is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that Party;

(d) is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a resident of the territory controlled by a Party to the conflict;

(e) is not a member of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict; and

(f) has not been sent by a State which is not a Party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces.\(^{109}\)

During the same year on 3 July in Libreville, Gabon the OAU established *The Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa*.\(^{110}\) This, Singer (2003) argues, was the most comprehensive attempt to regulate mercenarism. This provided national governments with a definition so they could pass their own laws to criminalise mercenary practices. The regional treaty defined mercenarism through the UN’s classification. As Singer (2003, p. 528) suggests, *Article 1* of the OAU’s Convention “identified mercenaries directly by referring to the purpose of their employment, specifically if they were hired for the overthrow of governments or OAU-recognised liberation movements.” As multilateral bodies, the UN and OAU established the first universally recognised and accepted definitions of mercenarism.

Manifested in these definitions are rigid boundaries dividing the illegitimate from legitimate, illegal from legal. Here the term ‘mercenary’ is applied to classify and categorise illegitimate and illegal practices and participation of individuals and

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organisations in warfare. As discussed earlier in chapter two, these are not clear-cut categories but dialectical relationships whereby the politics of regulation are negotiated. The UN’s definition clearly states that a mercenary does not have the legal right to be a combatant or prisoner of war. Article 47 of Protocol I seeks to erase the shadow spaces in which mercenaries were operating in conflict zones such as the Congo, Nigeria and Angola. The UN and OAU’s categorisations are, in essence, regulatory frameworks. Yet the significance of these official classifications is how the definitional borders they set in place are in fact porous, malleable and ambiguous. Orthodox approaches to mercenarism tend to adopt a legalistic perspective, when in fact the term is much more politically, socially, and culturally contingent.

Voices from the Shadows: Mercenarism as conceptually contested

It is important to consider the silenced voices of former private soldiers who fought in Africa’s wars, men who are socially, politically and culturally labelled ‘mercenaries’ (even if they rejected this term themselves) with careful consideration of their lived experiences. In addition, narratives from government records also provide a consolidation of official knowledge that also assists in extending understandings of how and why certain people are categorised and classified as mercenaries and the difficulties associated with doing so. Evidently, mercenarism is much more messy and ambiguous than both official and popular conceptions lead us to believe.

Although mercenarism is officially categorised and universally recognised it remains contested in its meanings and application. The concept of mercenarism, as stipulated by the UN and OAU, is problematic on a number of levels. The first is its rigidity and scope from which it fails to negotiate the porous boundaries between licit and illicit dimensions that underpin mercenary activities. These classifications are also riven with shadow spaces that rupture attempts to fix definitional boundaries. Foreign non-state soldiers consequently exploit these shadow spaces. Furthermore, problems emerge from the ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding the definition. This means that identifying these boundaries becomes exceedingly difficult from the perspectives of individual combatants, concerned publics, state-parties and non-state actors, at both national and multilateral levels as this chapter illustrates. These borders are not easily recognised.
“Classic” Conceptions of Mercenaries in the Public Imagination

The period in Africa from 1960 to the 1980s marks a time when “classic” conceptions of mercenaries dominated the public imagination. This classic and popular use of the term mercenary induces notions of military personnel who operate independently as specialist forces with minimal assets; for informal organisations; highly undisciplined; driven entirely by financial and resource rewards; disengaged from the state and other corporate entities; with moral, ideological or political orientations taking a backstage to financial gain and personal adventure (Clarke 1968; Mockler 1987; Tickler 1987). The term is also used interchangeably with pejorative references to “soldiers of fortune”, “dogs of war” or les affreux (which translates from French to the “horrible ones” in reference to the Congo mercenaries). These dominant notions of mercenaries have also been projected through media, military and political discourses over the late 20th Century and are evident in the UN and OAU’s official classifications of mercenarism that emerged in the late 1970s.

Undoubtedly, the notoriety, immorality and outright criminality of mercenary soldiering is apparent in a number of cases. Take for instance a number of the foreign mercenaries in the Congo during the late 1960s that were, in the words of the US ambassador at the time, “an uncontrollable lot of toughs… who consider looting or safe cracking fully within their prerogatives” (Ambassador Godley cited in Gleijeses 1994, p. 218). Their “serious excesses,” as reported by the CIA, included “robbery, rape, murder and beatings” (CIA report cited in Gleijeses 1994, p. 218). Furthermore, there were the atrocities perpetrated by British mercenary Costas Georgiou in Angola in 1976. Georgiou callously murdered his own men, including the execution of other British mercenaries on his orders (see Burchett & Roebuck 1977). The illegal actions of mercenaries in Africa have involved murder, the displacement of civilian populations, rape, widespread robbery and treasonous acts against legitimate governments. Testimonies from some of the former foreign soldiers I interviewed recalled first hand accounts of criminal behaviour from other private combatants.

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111 The actions of Costas Georgiou in Angola are detailed in chapter five.
112 Between the 1970s and 1980s foreign mercenaries were active in attempted or successful coup d’états in Gabon, Guinea, Benin, the Seychelles, and Comoro Islands (see Mockler 1987; Tickler 1987).
“Mercenary” Responses

It was fascinating meeting with veteran soldiers who had fought in Africa between the 1960s and 1980s. In the interviews we discussed their subjective understandings of the term ‘mercenary.’ One of the participants was a New Zealand man who fought in both the Rhodesian Security Forces and SADF during the 1970s and 80s. Sitting in the living room of his house we discussed the meanings of the term mercenary in great detail, or as he put it, in all its “media and political hype” (Interview North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Our dialogue as part of the interview process illuminates these themes. “What is a mercenary?” I asked him. He replied:

Mercenaries… well my definition of mercenary is not a man who has joined a regular army, an embodied force under military law, wears their uniform, and is subject to their military discipline, is no mercenary. He may well be a dick head but he is NOT a mercenary (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

I then asked whether he could “give me an example of a mercenary?” His response was quick, “The boys in the Congo, they would have been right up there. I mean that was a purely commercial operation. But not me” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). The interviewee continued to reflect on mercenaries in Africa in relation to ideas of legitimacy and illicit warfare, “They’re as old as time. But they’re mercenaries. They fight for money, they sign contracts and go and do what they do for money” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Then, as we discussed the difference between a mercenary and a legitimate soldier, I asked him, “How do you differentiate between the two: someone who is a mercenary and someone who is a legitimate soldier?” He informed me that, “If you’re in an embodied force under military discipline wearing their uniform and subject to their military discipline and receiving their pay, then you’re a soldier not a mercenary” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). This prompted me to ask him, that if someone is classified as a legitimate soldier do “they have to be under the jurisdiction of the state?” Taking a large mouthful of his instant made coffee, he replied “Yeah you’re just a soldier; you’re just a foreigner in someone else’s army. You’re a regular soldier in someone else’s army” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).
This narrative intersects with popular accounts of what is a mercenary. The criteria adopted by this interviewee to reject the label of mercenarism can, on the other hand, also be used to stereotype activities which are the hallmarks of the practice. Tickler (1987, p. 15) for example, has defined “the mercenary” as “a man who fights in the pay of a power that is not his own country.” This broad definition, as Tickler (1987) argues, encapsulates soldiers such as French Foreign Legionnaires, British personnel serving in the forces of the Sultan of Oman and Americans who fought with the Contras against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua in the early 1980s. Juxtaposing both perspectives demonstrates just how contested and debated these definitions are.

**Mercenaries, Money and “Adventure”**

Many of the respondents made the connection between mercenaries and the pursuit of money. Reiterating official classifications of mercenarism, they too regarded mercenaries as combatants who participate in conflicts solely for private financial gain. One man now living in New Zealand, who served as a soldier in two Southern African conflicts throughout the 1970s, argued, “a mercenary is somebody who directly sells their skills for money. In the context of the military environment, it’s your military skills” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Similarly, an ex-serviceman from the Rhodesian Security Forces, who left New Zealand in his early twenties to fight at the height of the bush war, considers mercenaries as “Men who go and get overpaid for fighting. The term mercenary refers to those who are only literally in it for money (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).” “A mercenary” he continued, “is someone who makes a lot of money out of other people’s misfortunes, or fortunes” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). The majority of respondents used fighting in conflict for money as a point to differentiate and disassociate themselves, and their experiences from having served in Africa, from being classified as a mercenary. For instance, another New Zealand citizen, who was actively serving for a military force in Southern Africa during the early 1960s, told me he:

looked upon mercenaries as fellas who did it for money. You know, if the pay was good, you know, they were there. I don’t know whether they had any real um… feelings politically. I always look at
a mercenary as a fella who is in it for the money. I certainly wasn’t a mercenary (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

Contrary to popular understandings and political and media critics who have stressed the monetary motivation of mercenaries, the men I spoke with emphasised the fact it was ‘adventure’ and ‘excitement,’ fulfilment of military aspirations, political causes and various other personal endeavours that had really compelled them to leave their countries of origin and fight in Africa. These motivations mirror Perlstein’s (1988) findings. Having interviewed 45 American mercenaries he found that “[A]dventure and political cause emerged as the primary motivations” (Perlstein 1988, p. 203). There were only two interviewees who acknowledged that money was part of the incentive for becoming freelance soldiers. One of them, recalling his time fighting against Simba rebels in the Congo, assured me he had served alongside other foreign combatants who were “purely in it for the money” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Gleijeses (1994, p. 218) also cites five French mercenaries who had arrived in the Congo in 1964 who, when asked by a foreign journalist why they had volunteered, were there “[F]or the money, first of all.” Yet for the men I interviewed money was not the principal motivation behind their decisions to become soldiers in Africa.

“Adventure! This is not a sane and sober career decision, you know. To up-sticks, leave your country and then go and join an army that is actually in a war” was one man’s animated response to my question asking him why he left Australia in 1974 to join the Rhodesian security forces in their violent struggle against black nationalist insurgents (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Every participant interviewed for this research was in some way attracted to fighting in Africa by the opportunity it presented for adventure and excitement. “It was about adventure” another man told me, “let’s go and find out what real soldiering is like. So yeah, the adventure aspect was a big part of it,” he said (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). In another interview, as I sat mid-morning in a comfortable chair discussing his combat involvement in two of Africa’s civil wars, the former freelance soldier, wearing an oil skin vest overtop of his red and white striped pyjamas, said “Well young fella, adventure was bloody beckoning so I signed up to the Rhodie

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113 For further discussions surrounding the motivations of mercenaries, in particular financial incentives for fighting, see Mockler (1987); Perlstein (1998); and Percy (2003, 2007a, 2007b).
army and away I went” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Numerous times throughout the interview he made inferences to the “fulfilment of adventure and ambitions” as being the underpinning motives for actively serving in the armed forces of Rhodesia and South Africa. On reflection, a New Zealand man told me his decision to serve in Africa was “probably adventure as much as anything. I haven’t thought much about it since, but it was purely an adventure as far as I was concerned” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010), while another participant said that the excitement of fighting in conflict was the reason he volunteered for the Rhodesian military.

When they were young men between the ages of 18 and 24 years old, more than 35 years ago, the former private soldiers I interviewed had believed Africa’s conflicts would offer them spaces to achieve their quests for adventure and excitement. Yet not all men were guided by the same aggressive sense of adventure. It seemed to be more the adventure of travel that had drawn them into the shadows of mercenary soldiering. A New Zealander who served in the Rhodesian army at the height of the civil war told me that going to that country:

wasn’t actually a career move. I went there because I wanted to see a new country and have a new experience and because I had soldiering experience I knew I could join the army and see a lot of the country. I didn’t go there because I thought there was going to be a conflict start. But, when it did I thought I’m well placed to train and be able to do my bit (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, November 2010).

In similar tone another interviewee, while explaining to me his motivations for going to fight in Rhodesia, said, “[W]ell I went there [Rhodesia] to do my OE not be involved in a conflict, although, it proved bloody exciting” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

*Military Discipline and Codes of Ethics*

Further divorcing themselves from official classifications, a number of private combatants flagged up the theme of military discipline. For one former foreign soldier who fought in Africa, “mercenaries, in my opinion, lack serious military discipline” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, November 2010). In an effort to position his military activities outside the definitional boundaries of mercenarism, he continued,
Mercenaries are not governed by military law or discipline, they may have their own unit, law and discipline sort of like five Commando had and those other commandos in the Congo... but at the end of the day they can walk away with all their money and leave that country...we didn’t (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, November 2010).

This man’s perspective reflects official observations of mercenaries as revealed in British government records. For instance, an intelligence report received by the British Embassy in Kinshasa in November 1967, and subsequently forwarded on to the Ministry of Defence in London, described foreign mercenaries in the Congo as “a drunken and indisciplined lot” who do not hesitate to shoot down Congolese soldiers in “heaps.”

Echoing similar sentiments, a veteran combatant who first fought in Africa during the late 1960s refuted the term mercenary and instead referred to himself as a “professional soldier” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). He emphasised his extensive military background and the strictest of military training and discipline, which, as he constantly reminded me, was instilled in him from his service in a regular European army. He then told me about his service in an armed military force that was employed by an African government in the late 1960s. The force consisted of other men from predominantly western industrialised countries. He recalled:

We had come, well most of us anyway, from special units like para [parachute] and things like that and...ah...we were trained, had self discipline anyway. We wouldn’t have gone over and fought like that. You can not do without self discipline or else you get chaos. You have to have self discipline. We weren’t like criminals if that’s what you think (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, November 2010).

This former foreign soldier uses his subjective experiences of having served as a legitimate soldier in a regular European army to circumvent orthodox and inflexible definitions of mercenarism as articulated by multilateral organisations such as the UN and OAU. In doing so he emphasised his own military discipline to contest the illegality of mercenarism and therefore moved himself outside the definitional boundaries that would otherwise classify him as a mercenary. In a similar fashion, yet drawing on his own past experiences from a different African conflict, a New Zealand

citizen who fought in the Rhodesian security forces during the 1970s also used his military discipline and perceived legitimacy to prevent him being identified and categorised as a former ‘mercenary’:

I think generally the term mercenary is derogatory in terms of military effort. I think in most people’s minds a mercenary is a cruel, potentially cruel and discriminate person. If you’re going to be a mercenary you’re going to kill and this sort of thing. It’s used in a way to influence somebody’s opinion on what is going on. The difference is in professionalism…and not just professionalism but also ethics. To be a good professional soldier there is a code of ethics involved (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, November 2010).

Unsure exactly what he meant I asked him, “What do you mean by a code of ethics?” He replied:

Well in terms of the way you behave. We operated by a very clear set of rules of engagement: when and when you may not open fire. There were occasions, I understand it since, where one or two individuals didn’t actually keep by those rules. I made sure my soldiers lived and operated by those rules of engagement. Those rules of engagement basically say you don’t open fire unless you can see the person you are firing at is armed or dressed as an enemy soldier. Or, if you’re fired at and you can’t see who is firing at you (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, November 2010).

By anecdotally claiming that ethical and moral responsibilities were deeply enmeshed with military professionalism, this former foreign soldier distanced himself from the criminality and illegalities associated with mercenary soldiering. This interviewee emphasised how the Rhodesian military had its own ethics, moral codes and responsibilities. He believed that his service in the Rhodesian army was like serving in the armed forces of other Commonwealth countries or western powers.

The following discussion is with a former foreign soldier, of immediate European descent, who participated in four different conflicts in Africa from 1960 to the late 1970s and is now living in a small town in the North Island. His account elucidates the way people can work with and shift the definitional boundaries of mercenarism, as codified by the UN and OAU. I asked him how he felt about the term mercenary. Rhetorically he replied, “What is a mercenary? Well, you know”, he continued, “we’re all mercenaries in a way. Ah… well, it’s still an individual thing; how you feel. And most people I knew as mercenaries they… um… they had reasons
why they were there” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, 2010). I was slightly puzzled by this observation and was hoping he would elaborate, so asked, “Such as?” His response was swift, “The purpose to protect farmers and the plantation owners who bloody built the country and... um... yeah that was the underlying... and of course there was money, always take the money” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Giving this some thought as I took a sip from my hot cup of tea, I asked, “[W]ould you agree if someone called you a mercenary?” He replied, “I couldn’t give a damn.” He continued:

Mercenaries are probably more correctly called Soldiers of Fortune but... I call them professional soldiers. I call myself a professional soldier, not a mercenary. I am certainly not a soldier of fortune. A mercenary is a professional soldier and that’s what he thinks and that’s why he fights. A professional soldier doesn’t only fight for money, he fights for his beliefs and...ah...I have never seen a mercenary going over to a side he didn’t believe in, very seldom (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

“What if he believes in money?” I then asked him.

No, mercenary doesn’t just mean money...yeah this word mercenary...it’s a nice word for people who want to find an excuse for saying something against soldiering. ‘He’s not a soldier he’s a mercenary’ Bullshit!” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

Paradoxically this veteran soldier perceives mercenaries as being driven by money and personal beliefs while at the same time attempting to use these points to disassociate himself from being classified a mercenary. In doing so he specifically acknowledged that labelling someone ‘a mercenary’ is a way of differentiating between legitimate and illegitimate soldiering. This narrative problematised official definitions of mercenarism. It remains unclear whether this former combatant believes that his participation in Africa’s conflicts was a mercenary intervention. His responses to my questions blurred boundaries used to separate legitimate from illegitimate and illicit soldiering.
Two private combatants I interviewed on separate occasions had, over the duration of our two to three hour interviews, moved with relative ease back and forth across the boundaries of mercenarism. When answering my initial question on whether he referred to himself as a mercenary, one veteran soldier who originated from New Zealand and had fought in two major African conflicts said, “I’m not a mercenary; a professional soldier yes, but a mercenary no” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Later in the interview I asked him, “From your personal experiences can you explain your role in that conflict?” Strikingly, he replied, “Well yeah, I was a mercenary. You know, every bloody nation has mercenaries… They’re soldiers getting paid…even the New Zealand army has mercenaries” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

In a separate interview another man, a New Zealander who had served in the Rhodesian Security Forces and SADF, was explaining his military background and why he had chosen to enlist in the SADF over other foreign armies. He told me that, “At the time I ranked where the most action was and according to how much they were going to pay” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). I responded, “Is that not somewhat of a mercenary approach?” “Fucking aye! It was nice to have more dough”¹¹⁵ he replied, saying that he had “nothing against having more money” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Thirty minutes later he then attempted to divorce himself from being categorised as a mercenary by declaring, “I’m not a mercenary, and never was. I’ve fought for money but I’m not a mercenary” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Cases such as these illustrate the ambiguous, porous and ever shifting borders used to classify who is and is not a mercenary. There are times when not even the soldiers interviewed were themselves entirely sure.

The majority of former foreign soldiers interviewed for this research contested the term mercenary. They argued that their actions and participation in Africa’s conflicts cannot be classified as mercenarism. A number of reoccurring themes emerged such as professionalism, discipline, money, and codes of ethics from which they used to differentiate and disassociate themselves from being labelled as

¹¹⁵ “Dough” is a colloquialism used throughout New Zealand and Australia that means money.
mercenaries. Their perspectives shed new light on the ways in which classifications of mercenarism are socially and culturally construed.

Mercenaries, Rhodesia and the Shadows of UN Protocol 1, Article 47

By examining the case of foreign soldiers who left their countries of origin and volunteered to serve in the Rhodesian security forces during the bush war, it is possible to further explore the conceptual ambiguity of the term mercenary as defined by the 1977 UN Geneva Convention protocol 1, Article 47. These definitions prove to be more problematic when attempting to apply them to foreign soldiers who fought for the Smith regime.

As cited earlier in this chapter, these conventions use six separate clauses (numbered a. to f.) to classify and categorise mercenary soldiering. Yet in between each of these clauses are shadow spaces where transitionary gaps, exclusions and ambiguities emerge. Foreign combatants who fought in the Rhodesian civil war moved between these shadow spaces. The former foreign soldiers I interviewed continue to use these spaces to contest and avoid being classified as mercenaries while allowing them to assert their legitimacy as military personnel who served in a structured, disciplined and internally legitimate armed force. Although clauses a, b and f are in fact applicable to foreign nationals who served in the Rhodesian army it is clauses c, d and e that are most problematic. Through the case of Rhodesia this section examines each of the clauses c, d and e of article 47 to illuminate the social, cultural and political forces affecting attempts to codify concepts of mercenarism.

For example, Clause C defines a mercenary as any person:

motivated to take part in the hostilities by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that party.\textsuperscript{116}

Foreign soldiers serving in the Rhodesian army were subject to the same rate of pay as Rhodesian nationals of the same rank or operating in a similar capacity. Pay rates,

as frequently specified in interviews with ex-Rhodesian servicemen, were
standardised irrespective of their country of origin. One man, a New Zealander who
did three years service in the Rhodesian army during the bush war, confidently
assured me:

In the Rhodesian army, sure you might have been next to a useless
soldier, but we were wearing the same uniform and we were
drawing the same pay. Obviously there was a distinction in pay
between national service, territorials and regulars. Regulars were
paid twice what a national serviceman was. But you weren’t paid
more because you came from New Zealand or America or anywhere
else (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

In another interview, with a New Zealand man who joined the Rhodesian Light
Infantry (RLI) as a 20-year old during the late 1970s, explained to me that everyone
he served with was on the same pay rate. While going through an old shoe box full of
documents and memorabilia from his time in the bush war, he said, “hang on I just
saw it a second ago [pause while he pulls out and reads a tattered white piece of paper
with faded green writing on it, which reminds me of a receipt one gets after
purchasing groceries at the supermarket]… Yeah that’s my rate of pay” (Interview,
North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Handing me the original pay slip he tells
me “That’s 45 bucks¹¹⁷ special unit. So there was my unit the RLI… We got an extra
45 bucks a month. So that was my total, just under 200 bucks a month, that’s what I
got paid” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). This was reaffirmed
in an official Rhodesian Army recruiting booklet, dated 1 October 1975, sent to
foreign soldiers living in the UK, which had been obtained and archived by the
FCO.¹¹⁸

The perceived meagre salaries paid to members of the Rhodesian army was
emphasised by some of the research participants as a way of countering suggestion
they could have been classified as mercenaries. During the initial stages of an
interview with a New Zealand man, who instead of returning home after his service in
Rhodesian during the late 1970s, decided to stay in Africa, commented:

Do you know what our wages in the Rhodesian army were? They
were 130 dollars a month. So that depletes the bloody argument of

¹¹⁷ “Bucks” is colloquial slang for dollars. The interviewee was referring to Rhodesian dollars.
¹¹⁸ Accessed in, FCO 36/1872, Mercenaries and Recruitment for Rhodesia: Part A, 1976, BNA, Kew,
London.
high paid mercenaries, aye. That was Rhodesian dollars (Telephone interview, Southern Africa, November 2010).

Then in the latter stages of our two-hour interview he sought to reinforce his earlier point, “As I said we got 130 dollars a month, you’re not really a mercenary are you? It sort of defeats the purpose of the word. Everybody thinks you’re making thousands of dollars” (Telephone interview, Southern Africa, November 2010). The standardised pay received by foreign soldiers who served in the Rhodesian army further complicates definitions that categorise mercenarism through discrepancies in financial or material gain. White (2004, p. 115) affirms that “all foreign (as opposed to foreign born) soldiers fought under decidedly unmercenary conditions,” arguing that they “were, at the military’s insistence, paid and taxed at local rates which were substantially higher for enlisted men than conscript soldiers (White 2004, p. 115.” Those former foreign soldiers who fought in Rhodesia echoed White’s observations and in doing so circumvent official classifications.

*Clause D*, in *Article 47 of protocol I* of the UN Geneva Conventions defines a mercenary “as a person who is neither a national of a party to the conflict nor a resident of the territory controlled by a party to the conflict.” It was through their Rhodesian citizenship and residency that foreigners fighting in the Rhodesian army could exploit shadow spaces in the UN’s definition of mercenaries. Nearly all foreigners recruited into the army were encouraged by Rhodesian authorities to apply for residency on their arrival. It was highly likely that most men did, as White (2004) provides statistics to show that 40 per cent of Rhodesian males had been born in another country. In a letter of appointment from the Rhodesian Army addressed to successful applicant Mr. J.W.F. Turner of Cromwell, UK, on 3 September 1976, it informed him, “[T]o conform with Immigration Regulations, it will be necessary for you to apply for a Residence permit on attestation.” Moreover, I asked one former foreign soldier who fought in the bush war whether he became a citizen of Rhodesia. He promptly replied, “Yeah I did, straight away. I was a citizen. Even when it became Zimbabwe Rhodesia, and I still have the Zimbabwe Rhodesia passport” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Then, momentarily excusing himself, he

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went and retrieved the passport from his bedroom to show me. Another former soldier reasoned, “Rhodesia was desperate for manpower. So the citizenship process for us foreigners was fast tracked by today’s standards” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). Clause d. certainly becomes difficult when attempting to classify mercenaries as neither a national or resident to the party they are fighting for.

On a separate level, reflected in the wider political processes occurring at the time, White (2004) recognises how it becomes messy and problematic for foreign soldiers to claim legitimacy through their Rhodesian citizenship and identity as “the state [Rhodesia] that imagined its own independence [UDI] now had soldiers who imagined themselves to be Rhodesian, making any shred of legitimacy of national identity problematic in the extreme” (White 2004, p. 117). Citizenship in Rhodesia was, in essence, not politically recognised outside the country. Yet the subjective experiences of former foreign soldiers, who fought in the Rhodesian army and received Rhodesian citizenship or residency, blur the boundaries of mercenary soldiering to the point where these boundaries are unrecognisable.

Clause E states that a mercenary is a person who “is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict.”121 Both the testimonies of private soldiers and official records reveal how foreign combatants from other countries were officially recruited into the Rhodesian Security Forces to fight against the ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrilla forces. A New Zealand man recalled that from his experiences in the Rhodesian army during the bush war he had “a limited services contract, which was a three year short term… It certainly wasn’t a mercenary situation. I was a regular force soldier on short term contract which was three years” (Interview, South Island, New Zealand, November 2010). In attempting to reinforce his legitimate service, another New Zealand citizen who fought in the RLI stated “The first thing I should tell you is that in the Rhodesian army I was number [omitted for anonymity]. See I’ve got a force number so you can find me in the records. That was in the Rhodesian army, in the South African army I was…” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010). One respondent who also sought to cement his legal status as a serving member of the Rhodesian army while simultaneously divorcing himself from being classified as a mercenary recalled:

At various times people have said ‘so you were a mercenary?’ and I said, ‘no I wasn’t a mercenary’ because I went and actually joined and signed a contract with the Rhodesian army. I served in the Rhodesian army. To me a mercenary would have been if I’d gone as part of an outside group...and they’d been an integral little mercenary group, the unit, to and of themselves, and not answerable necessarily to the government of the country. I went there to join the Rhodesian armed forces, and was subject to the laws of Rhodesia basically and a mercenary certainly isn’t (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, November 2010).

Furthermore, Rhodesian army recruiting documents suggest foreign soldiers were recruited into the armed forces through official channels. It was necessary that foreign applicants followed the correct legal procedures, as required by other established military institutions such as the British or New Zealand armies, to enlist in the Rhodesian armed forces. This included filling out standardised recruiting forms in their home country and then sending them back to Rhodesia to be vetted by officials in the Rhodesian army. By being accepted into the Rhodesian army, foreign combatants were then subject to Rhodesian law. As was the case for British subject, Mr. J.M.F Turner, whose letter of acceptance stipulated that by becoming a member of the Rhodesian army he was “subject to the Defence Act, 1972, and the relevant regulations which are promulgated in terms of this act.”

Foreign combatants could thus use the ‘legal’ channels of Rhodesia to become official members of the Rhodesian army even before arriving in the country. Being subject to Rhodesian civilian and military laws, former foreign soldiers directly contest and obscure definitions of mercenarism and therefore reject being classified as illegal and illegitimate combatants.

In the case of Rhodesia there is, however, contradictory evidence that suggests the Rhodesian security forces had employed foreign soldiers in a mercenary capacity. Two participants I interviewed told me about a unit of French soldiers employed by the Rhodesian army. One man said:

So the Rhodesian Security Forces used to say ‘There’s no mercenaries here in the Rhodesian Security Forces’. It wasn’t quite right for... the only one was that they brought a bunch of French guys out – ex Foreign Legionnaire guys out, and they were attached to 1st Rhodesian Regiment. But they were autonomous, and those guys got a thousand bucks Rhodesian a month, which is pretty good

money, it was four times what we were getting. In fact, five times (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, October 2010).

He then recalled an encounter he and his unit in the Rhodesian Light Infantry had with the French troops. “They all had big long growths, they had great lengths of machine gun bandoliers over the place, it was like Pancho Vila right, they looked like the wild bunch, their discipline was crap” (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, 2010). His account evokes notions of the classical mercenary – rough, disordered, unconventional and undisciplined. Another New Zealand veteran of the Rhodesian bush war told me:

…when I left, the Rhodesians started to experiment. There were a couple of companies of French troops that came across from somewhere and they were really the closest to mercenaries that I’ve seen and they operated separately and they were commanded separately and it didn’t work out well at all. The Rhodesian government was never keen to use mercenaries, nor did they think they would need to (Interview, North Island, New Zealand, November 2010).

There are some accounts and official records that mention the presence of 7 Independent Company, a unit of French soldiers who were recruited into the Rhodesian army in the late 1970s. Furthermore, an article in The Guardian on 1 February 1978 claimed, “one hundred former members of the French Foreign Legion are believed to be fighting as a special combatant unit within the Rhodesian army.” The employment of French mercenaries into the Rhodesian security forces seems to have been cast in the shadows of war and time (White 2004).

Through their lived experiences and subjective understandings soldiers who served in the Rhodesian armed forces sought to position themselves outside the defining boundaries of mercenarism. They were able to negotiate and then assert their

123 In their work, Moorcraft and McLaughlin (2010, pp. 54-55) make a fleeting mention of the French unit. They state, “7. Indep. Coy. was a cover unit of French recruits into the Rhodesian forces. Some were veterans of the Foreign Legion, but they were not successful in Rhodesian conditions and were disbanded.” White (2004, p. 115) confirms this last point by referring to the French troops as “incompetent.”

legitimacy and legal status as soldiers in a disciplined and structured army, which in their opinions were far removed from the ad hoc mercenary forces that fought in the Congo and Angola. The case of foreigners in the Rhodesian military coupled with the realities of the conflict crystallises the ambiguities, uncertainties and problems within official concepts of mercenarism, as articulated by multilateral organisations such as the UN and OAU.

However, one crucial factor in the case of Rhodesia cannot be overlooked. Following UDI the international community, spearheaded by the UN, denied the Smith regime any political legitimacy. Consequently Rhodesia was unrecognised by the international community. White (2004, p. 104) argues, “[O]fficials and supporters described it as a peculiar utopia located outside time and space, and certainly outside Africa.” Britain, along with the Commonwealth, declared that Rhodesia was in direct rebellion against its constitutional authority of the Crown. In an official press release on 22 July 1976, for instance, the New Zealand government under Prime Minister Muldoon reiterated that it did not “recognise the illegal regime in Rhodesia and does not have relations with it.”

Because Rhodesia was an unrecognised state, those foreigners who fought for the Rhodesian armed forces were politically vulnerable to being labelled ‘mercenaries’ even if that conflicted with their own experiences and self-representations affirming commitments to military professionalism. Although the term is politically, socially and culturally contingent, it is those controlling the levers of power that influence public and official perceptions of who is and is not a ‘mercenary.’ To explore this further it is necessary to delve deeper into the shadows of war where politics, diplomacy and mercenarism intersect in nuanced and complex ways.

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The Shadows of Power and the “Mercenary Problem”: Disorder, Anxiety and Affect

“The mercenary problem has been most apparent in Africa,” declared a confidential report compiled by the West and Central African Department at the FCO in 1968. It proceeded to inform government officials within the confines of Whitehall that “there is likely to be a continuing market for mercenaries, particularly English or French speaking ones, so long as newly-emergent countries remain unstable and rivalries between alternative regimes within them persist.” The presence of British and Commonwealth mercenaries in Africa’s conflicts between 1960 and 1980 characterised a form of disordered conflict that troubled government administrators in the UK and New Zealand. By periodising these conflicts this chapter explores how the state reacted to the illicit recruitment and service of mercenaries in Africa, which in turn, allows for an anthropological commentary on diplomacy.

Sources in files from Britain and New Zealand’s national archives offer a rich repository of information, data and narrative that provides valuable insights into the shadowed practises of mercenaries. Documents reveal how government officials operated as shadow agents, utilising and exploiting shadow spaces from which they discussed, debated, asserted and articulated different forms of power when attempting to control the disordered actions of ‘mercenary’ soldiers. In doing so, officials tended to grapple with the legal aspects of regulation, infrequently assessing the political, social and cultural forces that were readily at play in the conflict zones of Africa.

127 Ibid.
The Rise of Britain’s “Mercenary Problem”

The involvement of white British and Commonwealth nationals in the mercenary forces who fought for the Katanga secessionists in the Congo from 1960 to 1963 and their later employment by the Congolese governments to fight against the Simba rebels from 1964 onwards marked the start of what British officials referred to as the “mercenary problem.”\(^{128}\) During a wave of anti-mercenary politics that swept over Africa and throughout the international community, following chaotic events in the Congo, the UK government faced increasing international political pressure to exert tighter control and stop the recruitment and service of British and Commonwealth nationals in Africa’s hostilities.\(^{129}\)

By late 1961 the UN had strengthened its campaign to protect the Congo from outside interference and support the Congolese government in restoring and maintaining political and civil stability. Increasingly concerned, the UN requested the British government assist in preventing mercenary recruits from going to Katanga. On 30 July 1962, the Foreign Office received telegram No. 1141 from the British delegation at the UN in New York. Titled “Katanga Mercenaries”, it informed the FO that the UN Secretariat had received a detailed report on Belgian and French mercenaries who were “on their way to Katanga via Rhodesia” and that the “[S]ecretariat would be grateful for any information about this which may come our way and for any action which may be possible to prevent these alleged recruits from reaching their destination.”\(^{130}\) Several months later on 10 October, having received reports of an “increase of mercenaries in Katanga,” a British diplomat in Salisbury, Rhodesia wrote to the Central African Office in London, “[I]f Her Majesty’s Government is still intent on trying to avoid use of force in Katanga, I assume the sooner we are seen to be taking energetic action against the renewed flow of

\(^{128}\)Scattered throughout the official records is specific evidence of citizens from Britain, Rhodesia, Kenya and Australia who fought as mercenaries in the Congo during the 1960s. See Activities of Mercenaries – Congo, 1962, FO 371/161535; Recruitment of Mercenaries, 1964, FO 317/176717; Proposals for control of recruitment of Mercenaries, 1964 – 1966, FO 371/176733; and General Correspondence DR Congo: Situation concerning Missionaries and Mercenaries: Foreign Office, 1965, FCO 396/5809, BNA, Kew, London.

\(^{129}\) The exact number of British and Commonwealth citizens who served as mercenaries in the Congo during the 1960s remains obscure. However, some estimates have suggested they numbered around 32 operational combatants (see Aspinall 1990).

mercenary activity into Katanga, the better.”

Then, at 1.20pm the same day, the FO requested that British delegates in New York promptly inform the UN that Britain had “introduced a system whereby visa applications for transit through the federation to Katanga are referred both to London and Salisbury in all cases where there is suspicion that the applicant may be a potential mercenary.” In promoting their success at disrupting the flow of mercenaries into Katanga, they told the UN “with the cooperation of Federal authorities we have already stopped a number of suspect applicants.”

Amongst those suspected mercenaries who were denied transit visas through the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland were the “mysterious M. Serge Paire”, James Blackburn and Robert Mitcheson.

By the mid-1960s the Foreign Office was providing consular assistance to British and Commonwealth citizens who had been arrested by Congolese authorities for their mercenary activities. In November 1965 the British Embassy in Leopoldville were considering the best way to “obtain the early release of Mr. Larkin”, an Australian mercenary serving a prison sentence in the Congo. “The Embassy agreed in principle”, wrote Barber, “that an appeal against the sentence could be made on the grounds that the prisoners had no defence lawyer, that arrangements for interpreting were inadequate and that there was confusion over the length of the sentence pronounced by the judge.”

Britain was, by the mid-1960s becoming evermore embroiled in the political and diplomatic mess created by the actions of white mercenary forces in the Congo.

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131 Telegram No. 1326, “Rumours with regard to increase of mercenaries in Katanga”, UK mission at the UN to FO, 10 Oct. 1962, FO 371/161535.
132 This refers to the Federation of Southern Rhodesian and Nyasaland (1953-1963).
133 Ibid.
134 Telegram No. 3615, FO to UK mission at the UN, 10 Oct. 1962, FO 371/161535.
135 Official records reveal that foreign mercenaries used the British semi-independent Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland as a legal channel of entry into the secessionist province of Katanga. For specific cases of those men prevented by UK authorities from crossing the Northern Rhodesia and Congolese border see FO 371/161535.
136 J.E. Larkin and his South African counterpart, Mr. von Staden had been captured and detained by the Congolese National Army for their role as mercenaries fighting for the Katanga secessionists. The two men were trialed in a Congolese court of law, found guilty for mercenary actions against the Congo state and sentenced to an unspecified length of time in Ndola civilian gaol. However, on 20 July 1965 both men escaped Ndola but were caught the next day and put into Camp Kokolo military prison. British and Australian diplomats voiced their concerns about the fairness and legitimacy of the trial. They used consular access to ensure both Larkin and von Staden were being treated humanely and received adequate food. (See General Correspondence DR Congo: Situation concerning Missionaries and Mercenaries: Foreign Office, 1965, FO 371/161535).
137 Australian Embassy to FO (KG 15814/61), 11 Nov. 1965, FO 371/161535.
British officials were, by the late 1960s, dedicating more time and energy to dealing with the delicate and tense diplomatic situation in the Congo. During July 1967, 160 western mercenaries backed by 1,600 dissident Katangese gendarmes revolted against the Congolese government after President Mobutu had disbanded them. In an aggressive move they captured the border city of Bukavu by force. Leader of the rebel mercenaries, Belgian national Jean Schramme, issued Mobutu an ultimatum giving him ten days to negotiate for peace.\(^{138}\) Mobutu immediately rejected this, asserting that he would “never stoop to negotiate with assassins” (Mobutu cited in *The Congo: Ultimatum from Bukavu* 1967). Two months later, after casualties on both sides and sensing an ominous defeat at the hands of the 30,000 strong Congolese National Army, Schramme told Mobutu he would call off the revolt in exchange for amnesty and a safe passage out of the Congo for his men.

Meanwhile, the OAU had unanimously passed a resolution in September calling for all mercenaries to immediately leave the Congo. To ensure this was peacefully achieved they requested the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).\(^{139}\) Yet backed by the strength of his army, Mobutu planned to capture the beleaguered white mercenaries and dissident Katangese troops and make a showcase out of them to deter any other potential mercenary forces planning to enter the Congo. Fearing Mobutu would inflict a violent reprisal against the mercenary soldiers the US, UK and other European Embassies began pouring immense political pressure on the Rwandan government to permit the rebel force to safely cross the border on foot and be evacuated by the ICRC in British, Belgium and French supplied aircraft.\(^{140}\) The involvement of western powers in the evacuation of mercenaries was met with sustained hostility from the Congolese government. Mr Mennell from the British Embassy in Kinshasa, having been informed by the American Ambassador

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\(^{138}\) Among Schramme’s terms was that that Mobutu return democratic government to the Congo, annul the treason conviction for ex-President Tshombe and make Tshombe a member of the cabinet. For a more detailed account surrounding actions of mercenaries in Bukavu see Mockler (1987); Tickler (1987); and Rogers (1998). Fascinatingly, these mercenaries were advocating for democracy.


\(^{140}\) Foreign Office records reveal that this evacuation was an international rescue operation headed by the ICRC but driven primarily by the US, British, French and Belgian governments who were collectively working towards a strategy to evacuate mercenary personnel from the Congo in an effort to avoid what Mr. Mennell from the British embassy in Kinshasa believed would be “the Congolese slaughter of unarmed mercenaries.” Telegram No. 987, Kinshasa to Foreign Office, 6 Nov. 1967, FCO25/120.
who “was received by President Mobutu this morning,” told concerned readers in London that Mobutu’s:

position about the mercenaries was however unshakable and he repeated that the Congo Government would regard it a very grave and unfriendly act if any Government participated in the evacuation of the mercenaries, who must be extradited to the Congo.¹⁴¹

However, with Britain’s support, the ICRC pushed on with the mission. Resisting Mobutu’s pressure to extradite the mercenaries back to the Congo, Rwandan authorities allowed the mercenary force and Katangese soldiers safe passage across the border to their eventual airlift out of the region.

The Bukavu evacuation is significant in the way Britain was forced into a diplomatically fragile situation. The ICRC informed British officials there were “four to five British mercenaries and one Rhodesian” held up in Bukavu.¹⁴² Despite this small number of British nationals, the UK government was committed to ensuring their safety. Tensions began mounting on Congolese and UK foreign relations. The difficulty facing British authorities is captured in a 7 November 1967 Foreign Office report:

Our position is that, on the one hand we wish to show ourselves willing and if possible provide tangible help with the evacuation [of mercenaries] as an international operation under the aegis of the Red Cross; on the other hand we clearly do not wish to lay ourselves open to charges that we are more concerned about the evacuation of white mercenaries, still less being in anyway responsible for their activities by giving undue attention to them than the Katangese gendarmes.¹⁴³

This approach appears to have derived from concerns within the Foreign Office on how best to manage the escalating crisis while protecting British national interests. Publicly Britain had deplored the employment of mercenaries in the Congo. Officials in Whitehall had been committed to ensuring that their involvement in the evacuation remained secret to avoid being interpreted as supporting white mercenaries who were contributing to the instability of the Mobutu government – an important Cold War ally rich in exploitable natural resources. The British government, however, was

¹⁴¹ Telegram No. 987, Kinshasa to Foreign Office, 6 Nov. 1967, FCO25/120.
¹⁴² Foreign Office report, “The Congo: Mercenaries”, 7 Nov. 1967, FCO25/120. In this report it is suggested that the ICRC estimate of British and Commonwealth mercenaries in Bukavu were “lower than some others that have been made.”
equally determined to avoid what was looming to be a potential humanitarian crisis and public relations disaster. They had a commitment to ensure the safety of British and Commonwealth nationals who were caught in a country where anti-European sentiments were running high. Should the white mercenaries have been extradited back to the Congo they would have faced long prison sentences at the least, but were more likely to have been executed on the orders of Mobutu. In turn this was likely to have provoked a public backlash at home in Britain. Adding to the tense situation, Mr Mennell from the British Embassy in Kinshasa recognised that “if mercenaries are returned to the Congo and executed without exception this will arouse anger amongst other mercenary groups, who might well determine to invade Congo in revenge.”[144] This would, as officials in London were well aware, deepen Britain’s involvement in mercenary problems.

The case of Bukavu is significant in the way it represents some of the particular challenges British officials faced when dealing with the actions of western mercenaries in newly independent African states. With British and Commonwealth citizens amongst their ranks, the activities of mercenary forces in the Congo laid the foundations for Britain’s mercenary problem in Africa. Reluctantly, the British government had become entangled in a complex web of diplomacy, politics and mercenaries. For policy makers in Britain and other Commonwealth countries, mercenary soldiers came to embody a certain disorder, ambiguity and unpredictability.

Post-Congo and the UK’s Official Reaction to Mercenaries

As mercenary forces departed the Congo in late 1967 and the country became more politically stable, British officials were, in ways that resonate with Douglas’s (1987) observations, deep within the shadows of government away from public and international scrutiny, assessing ways to deal with the “mercenary problem.”[145] On 15 January 1968 under the chairmanship of the Head of the Consular Department, representatives of the Commonwealth Office, the Foreign Office and the Home Office attended a meeting at Clive House in Whitehall, to discuss “the control of recruitment

[144] Telegram No. 987, FCO25/120.
of mercenaries.”146 Then, in July of that year the West and Central African Department prepared and distributed a highly classified paper to the Foreign Office, Commonwealth and Joint Offices. “[T]he general consensus of that meeting…was that some legislative action was necessary because no administrative means to stop people enlisting as mercenaries appeared feasible” the paper read.147

When government officials spoke of the “mercenary problem” they were in a way euphemistically referring to the adverse effects mercenaries had on British national interests. “The mercenaries”, an FCO policy report claimed, “have exercised an adverse influence quite disproportionately greater than their numbers and actual role suggest.”148 It explains three points of concern. First, how the presence of mercenaries “served to exacerbate anti-European feeling and made things much worse for the Europeans than they would have been otherwise.”149 It identified how Europeans travelling through “any African country in the area where the mercenaries have operated, particularly if his dress, route, or mode of transport is in the least unorthodox” or has a “quasi-military appearance, will in all probability, find himself thrown into prison as a suspected mercenary.”150 The third, and apparently the most pressing concern, was how the presence of mercenaries had “poisoned the atmosphere of our relations with most of the African states” and “interfered with relations between African states themselves and, by raising tension, threatened the peace and stability of the area, which we are anxious to see preserved.”151 For government officials in London the presence of mercenaries in Africa had made protecting national interests and maintaining international relations a difficult dilemma.

“The precise definition of ‘mercenary’: Britain’s inability to legislate

Mercenary events in the 1960s, mainly the Congo and Nigeria, had openly exposed inadequacies of British government policy in regulating the engagement of its citizens in military activity outside the UK.152 By January 1968 policy makers had agreed there were only two existing measures to regulate mercenary activities: the Foreign

146 “Control of Recruitment of Mercenaries”, FCO 31/339.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
Enlistment Act of 1870 and the withdrawal of passport facilities.\(^{153}\) As early as 1961, and again in 1964 and 1967, the Foreign Office had worked closely with legal advisers to consider whether the 1870 Foreign Enlistment Act applied to mercenaries in the Congo. The act made it an offence punishable by fine and imprisonment for British subjects, without official licence or exemptions from the Crown, to be recruited into the military or naval service of any foreign state.\(^{154}\) However, the act had only ever been selectively and irregularly enforced.\(^{155}\) In the aftermath of the Congo debacle, British authorities declared it an “unsatisfactory piece of legislation to apply to present-day circumstances”\(^{156}\) due to the extensive ambiguity of its definitions. These technical legal deficiencies had prompted the FO to examine new anti-mercenary legislation.

In conformity with the UN Security Council Resolution on the elimination of mercenaries in the Congo, adopted on 21 February 1961, the Foreign Office circular No. 36 of 13 April 1961 provided “that the passport of any UK national who took up a military engagement in the Congo other than under the United Nations command, should be invalidated or withdrawn.”\(^{157}\) British passport authorities were instructed by the Foreign Office to refuse passport facilities to any British national who applied for one in order to take up such an engagement. If authorities suspected this was indeed the case they were to ask “for a signed declaration that the applicant had no such intention.”\(^{158}\) However, when government officials reminded Alastair Wick, who served in the mercenary forces fighting for Tshombe and Mobutu in 1964, that he had signed this declaration, Wick successfully disputed that his passport should be

\(^{153}\) Ibid.

\(^{154}\) The statute was first passed in 1819 and later amended in 1870. The sections of the act which deals with mercenaries are section 4, which makes it an offence to enlist for a foreign state or induce others to do so, section 5, which extends the offence to those who leave the UK or any Dominion state with the intentions of enlisting in a foreign armed force, and section 30 which defines the meaning of a “foreign state” (see Burchett & Roebuck 1977, pp. 176-178).

\(^{155}\) The British government, in a failed attempt, first called upon the 1870 act to prosecute those fitting ships for use in the Franco-Prussian war (19 July 1870 – 10 May 1871). Britain’s policy was not to intervene, as Prime Minister Gladstone believed in self-determination for the German people (see Howard 2004). More than half a century later it was revived in January 1937 during the Spanish civil war. The government had considered applying the legislation to prohibit British volunteers from fighting for the Spanish Republic. In reference to this case, several scholars have recognised the failure of the act as a legal deterrent (Burchett & Roebuck 1977; Mackenzie 1999). It is important to note, however, that official records suggest no legal application of the act has taken place since the Italo-Turkish War (1912-1919). See “Control of Recruitment of Mercenaries”, FCO 31/339.

\(^{156}\) “Control of Recruitment of Mercenaries”, FCO 31/339.

\(^{157}\) Ibid.

\(^{158}\) This method of control proved ineffective in the case of Alistair Mackie who avoided legal channels by crossing the border from Northern Rhodesia into Katanga by merely walking through the bush. “Control of Mercenaries”, FCO 31/339.
revoked since he was in service of the legal Congolese government and that UK authorities had not suggested to him this was unacceptable.\footnote{Ibid.} There are no records to suggest that officials had discussed whether they prosecute Wick under the 1870 \textit{Foreign Enlistment Act}.

Enforcing the withdrawal of passport facilities from suspected or confirmed mercenaries was a fraught option for British authorities. To implement such action, the Foreign Office had to negotiate an array of legal discrepancies. In 1967 officials were growing frustrated with the inability to impound the passports of those British mercenaries evacuated from Bukavu. One official in Whitehall noted, “we have still been unable to obtain possession of the passports of those from whom passport facilities have been withdrawn.”\footnote{Ibid.} The Foreign Office were also aware that to revoke someone’s passport was encroaching on their civil liberties and that such action would almost certainly be disapproved of by parliament “on the grounds the subject has been restricted without due processes of the law.”\footnote{Ibid.} Officials were well aware that regulating mercenarism through the withdrawal of passport facilities was a desperate measure.

\textbf{Uncertainty, Dilemma and Reluctance within Britain’s Corridors of Power: the political aftermath of mercenary events in the Congo and Nigeria}

In response to the governments failure at regulating the recruitment of British mercenaries during the 1960s, Donald Tebbit from the FCO, believed “[N]ow that the Nigerian civil war is over this would in principle be as good a time to legislate.”\footnote{Correspondence, D.C. Tebbit to E. G. Le Tocq, 4 Feb. 1970, \textit{Policy of UK on Mercenaries} 1970, FCO 46/556, BNA, Kew, London.} Written on 4 February 1970, Tebbit’s suggestion came during a lull in mercenary activity. His own opinion, however, was that “the Permanent Under Secretary should \textit{not} [emphasis in original] press for the introduction of new legislation, which although technically more complete, might still be impossible to administer.”\footnote{Ibid.} Having recognised that the 1870 Foreign Enlistment Act was unable to control British
and Commonwealth mercenaries, government officials were, at the request of cabinet secretary Sir Burke Trend, once again grappling with the mercenary problem, or as Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, George Thomas, referred to in an official report “this murky corner of Affairs.” Members from the Cabinet Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Defence, Disarmament and Law Officers Departments, and even the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street, were engaged in debates over Britain’s mercenary policies.

In November 1969 the subject of mercenaries in Africa was raised in the Cabinet Office following allegations that there were British citizens employed to fight for Biafra in the Nigerian civil war. The Attorney General informed Prime Minister Harold Wilson that, contrary to conclusions drawn by the FCO, the Foreign Enlistment Act was indeed a sound basis to justify prosecution. Prime Minister Wilson then suggested to Cabinet that, “consideration should be given at leisure to legislation that would fill the gap in the Foreign Enlistment Act.” By early 1970 both the Overseas Policy and Defence (Official) Committee (OPDO) and interdepartmental “[W]orking party on powers to control the recruitment of mercenaries and the export of goods and services” had found the Act to be insufficient, describing it as “difficult to apply and relatively simple to circumvent”, “riddled with loopholes” and completely lacking “flexibility of application.”

In May 1969 the applicability of the Foreign Enlistment Act was once again called into question after Arab states “made representations” to the British government “about dual British/Israeli nationals alleged to be serving in the Israeli Armed Forces.” This created more political problems for government officials already burdened by deficiencies in the Act. British authorities, however, were quick to rule out the likelihood of applying the 1870 Foreign Enlistment Act to dual citizens.

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164 Having read the official report JIC(68)9 about mercenaries in the Congo, and conscious of the problem arising from the recruitment of mercenaries in Biafra, Sir Burke Trend asked the government whether something could or should be done to discourage the recruitment of mercenaries in the United Kingdom. See Policy of UK on Mercenaries 1970, FCO 46/556.


167 FCO 46/556.


169 Ibid.

170 Draft memo, n.d. FCO 46/556.
One official from the FCO pointed out “Britain accepted that the country of where an individual is a resident has the right to enlist such a person into their military forces.”\textsuperscript{171} They argued if the government used municipal law and penal consequences to “prohibit individuals from serving in the armed forces of the states of their other nationality” it would be “unfair on the individual” and contravene “international agreements on dual nationality to which we are party.”\textsuperscript{172} Despite diplomatic initiatives from the United Arab Republic (which was an unsuccessful merger between Egypt and Syria from 1958 to 1961), British authorities refused to take any action against dual British/Israeli nationals because doing so would be “politically embarrassing.”\textsuperscript{173}

\textit{The Mercenary Dilemma}

In March 1970 policy makers of the OPDO had discussed amongst themselves if it was now the right time to introduce new anti-mercenary legislation. “Such legislation” they agreed “would be difficult to frame.”\textsuperscript{174} Their reasons were unambiguous:

It would involve precise definition of the term ‘mercenary’. We would want it to exclude people whom we considered it in our interest to make available to foreign forces (e.g. serving members of H.M. Forces assisting in the training and development of armed forces of other countries under terms and conditions specified by Her Majesty’s Government). It would probably have to delegate considerable powers to the executive, which would be unattractive to Parliament. Perhaps most important, it would be embarrassing to administer. There is further difficulty that it is hard to prove that someone has engaged in mercenary activities, since such activities necessarily take place outside our jurisdiction and it is difficult to obtain evidence. On the other hand there are many foreign citizens serving in H.M. Forces, notably in the brigade of Gurkhas and also many Irish citizens.\textsuperscript{175}

Policy makers in Whitehall were well aware that it was in Britain’s national interests to maintain vague definitional boundaries of mercenarism. Introducing new legislation would remove this ambiguity that created shadow spaces from which the

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} Report, PQ Commonwealth Secretary (Cols. 1062-3), 30 Jan. 1968, FCO 46/556.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
government was contracting the services of British Officers to allies such as the Nigerian federal defence force and the Sultan of Oman, while at the same time employing foreign soldiers from Nepal and the Republic of Ireland in its own military forces. Not only would administering such legislation be politically “embarrassing” and “impossible”, as Donald Tebbit of the FCO claimed, it would jeopardise Britain’s involvement in the centuries old international trade of mercenaries. Policy makers in Whitehall were faced with a mercenary dilemma. For British officials, fulfilling international obligations (such as the 1967 UN resolution condemning the use of mercenaries) conflicted with the strategic benefits gained by employing foreign nationals in UK armed forces.

A highly classified report drafted by the Committee of Privy Counsellors on the recruitment of mercenary activities, titled “The Foreign Policy Aspects to Mercenary Activities,” exposed the ambiguous relationship between the state and mercenaries fighting in Africa. Under five headings (A to E) the report considers the foreign policy aspects raised by mercenaries. The forth heading “D” affirms “[T]he need to bear in mind the fact that in certain circumstances the employment of British mercenaries may be helpful to British interests.” In 1964, during the second intervention of mercenaries, who were this time employed by the Congolese government to fight against the Simba rebellion, Britain was:

publicly pledged to support the stability of the country under a strong Central Government and decided in the circumstances not to take action against the recruitment of mercenaries on the grounds that they were not ‘in a position to exercise effective control over their nationals selling their military services to the legitimate government of a foreign power.”

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176 At the time of the Nigerian civil war there were three ex-Naval officers on contract to the Nigerian Navy: Commander Rawe, Lieutenant Commander Cook and Lieutenant Commander Denham, who according to official records had been there before independence. See Telegram 177, High Commission Lagos to Commonwealth Office, “Mercenaries”, 9 Feb. 1968, British Subjects Abroad. Commonwealth Countries: Recruitment of UK Citizens as Mercenaries, 1967 – 68, FCO 47/55.
178 Britain had of course publicly deplored the actions of mercenaries and voted on 15 November 1967 for the UN Security Council Resolution on the Congo, which, as one member of the FCO pointed out, “called upon all countries to take appropriate measures to prevent mercenaries from renewing their activities against the State.” Foreign Office officials discussed this in report: PQ Commonwealth Secretary (Cols. 1062-3), 30 Jan. 1968, FCO 46/556.
180 “The Foreign Policy Aspects of Mercenary Activities”, n.d., p. 3
The British government wanted to strengthen their relations with the Congo but to do so they needed a stable Congolese government. Therefore, policy makers in Whitehall were reluctant to take action against British mercenaries employed by the legitimate Congolese government, as they perceived them to be maintaining political stability in the country. Britain’s opposition to the intervention of mercenaries in Africa was contingent. When they were seen to be helping British interests they were given leeway in their activities, which in turn created an ambiguous space from which they could operate.

Disinterest and Reluctance

Throughout the corridors of power government officials were seemingly reluctant to take proactive measures to resolve the mercenary problem. In May 1970, D.J. Hall from the Defence department wrote to Legal Advisor P.J. Allot telling him:

I have the impression that as a result of talking to various people in Whitehall and particularly Mr. Norbury of the Cabinet Office there is a marked lack of interest about this subject in Whitehall except on the part of the Prime Minister and Sir Burke Trend.  

This lackadaisical attitude is evident in Hall’s personal opinion as he went on to tell Allot that recommendations drawn by the interdepartmental working party, of which he was a member, were “unexceptional” and:

do no more than amplify what is already known and agreed. They do not of themselves do anything to alter the conclusions of OPDO, namely that the balance of advantage was against further legislation at present time. They are however a mind-clearing exercise and would serve as the basis for discussing legislation at some stage in the future should the mercenary problem once again become a matter of public interest…I see no reason for taking the matter further at present.  

Read within the wider context of Britain’s mercenary problem in Africa, Hall’s comments suggest there was no need to legislate since mercenary events in the Congo and Nigeria had now ceased. To legislate, of course, would require a precise definition of mercenarism that would be an administrative nightmare and a direct

182 Correspondence, D. J. Hall of Defence Department to legal advisor P. J. Allot, “Mercenaries”, 5 May 1970, FCO 46/556.
183 Ibid.
threat to British military interests at home and abroad. Yet the exact reasons why politicians, diplomats and public servants adopted a seemingly unwilling stance towards proactive measures against mercenarism remains obscured in the shadows. One must not overlook how the issue of mercenaries in Africa was caught amongst Whitehall’s deeper, wider and more nuanced political forces. The shared attitude of government officials at the time does, however, indicate that Britain’s solution to the mercenary problem was *ad hoc*, just as many mercenaries were.

**Angola and the Open Market of Mercenaries**

In 1975 John Banks, a dishonourably discharged former British paratrooper, began placing the following advert in various national newspapers:

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EX-SAS, paratroopers and commandos wanted for interesting work abroad. Ring Camberley 33456.
(Banks 1978, p. 99).
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This was one of the first of many advertisements in the British press that enticed 36 men to their deaths, 17 wounded, seven missing and nine to lengthy prison sentences in Angola.¹⁸⁴ In total, 143 mainly British and some American citizens were recruited to fight for the FNLA on the front lines of Angola’s civil war. After the publication of the above advertisements a dramatic series of events unfolded which ensured the international spotlight was thrown back on Africa’s mercenary invasion. The British government was once again swept up in a storm of mercenary provoked political turmoil.

In 1975 Peter McAleese, Glasgow born ex-British SAS combatant and convicted criminal, was a bored 32 year old working on British North Sea oil rigs. Having been informed by his friend Bob Varey of an advertisement in a newspaper offering “interesting work abroad”, McAleese left his home in Hereford and travelled to the Centre Court Hotel in London where at 7pm on 27 May he and other enthusiastic men met John Banks. Banks was running a recruitment drive for British mercenaries to fight in Africa. A “delusional” Banks delivered a dramatic one-man

¹⁸⁴ For a complete list of names, hometowns and “notes on outcome” of the Angolan mercenaries see Peter McAleese’s autobiography (McAleese 1993, p. 263).
brief consisting of covert meetings, spies, aristocratic ‘paymasters’ and “fighting for the Blackman against whites” (Banks cited in McAleese 1993, p. 60). Taking the opportunity to talk to the other men in attendance, McAleese (1993, p. 61) “quickly realised that the place was full of dreamers, Walter Mitties, and space cadets with no military experience whatsoever.” It was “just like something out of a movie”, “the whole atmosphere was entirely phoney” McAleese (1993, p. 61) recalls. Convinced Banks’s plans were “plainly fantasy” he returned to Hereford (McAleese 1993, p. 61).

In the months that followed, Banks’s mercenary story had been spread over the British Press. Meanwhile, British security authorities were keeping close tabs on these mercenary recruiters. Ironically, it was from this given publicity that Banks was actually contracted to supply men for a real conflict in Africa. On 17 January 1976 McAleese (1993, p. 64) received a phone call from a colleague of Banks, “Major Nick Hall” a British national serving in Holden Roberto’s FNLA, offering him a job abroad with all expenses paid. Having packed an overnight bag and dressed in a suit McAleese (1993) took the train to London and headed for the Post House Hotel. He and 18 other men were paid £200 and issued a Sabena airline ticket to Kinshasa via Brussels (McAleese 1993, p. 66). Accompanied by Hall, McAleese (1993) and the other men were transported to Heathrow airport and, unhindered by British border authorities, left for Angola. On arrival at Ndele in Kinshasa their employer, Holden Roberto of the FNLA, greeted them. Leaving Roberto behind, McAleese (1993, pp. 66-67) explains how the men crossed into Northern Angola by bus arriving at FNLA Headquarters and joined an advance party of four British mercenary leaders who included Costas Georgiou (alias ‘Colonel’ Callan). McAleese (1993, pp. 68-69) recalls the apprehension he felt when they first arrived, vividly describing a scene of disorder, ill-discipline, abuse, and violent acts perpetrated by the four established

185 McAleese confirms that Bank’s had implied Colonel David Stirling, founder of the British SAS, was bankrolling the recruitment of a mercenary force that was to fight against the Smith regime in Rhodesia. There is no evidence remotely connecting Stirling to Banks, his mercenary recruitment and Rhodesia. Stirling believed in white minority rule and was staunchly opposed to black nationalist majority rule in Africa (Burchett & Roebuck 1977). Banks (1978, p. 99), in his autobiography, claims he was told by an organisation he “was connected with from his mercenary days” whether he would “recruit a large force of mercenaries.” Their task, Banks goes on to say, was to “raid over the Zambian border into Rhodesia doing many guerrilla-type sabotage operations…I didn’t know how the prospective recruits would react to the thought of fighting white soldiers for a black boss” (Banks 1978, p. 100).


187 Nick Hall was a former British paratrooper. In the early 1970s Hall had been caught selling weapons to the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force in Northern Ireland. He was dishonorably discharged from the army and sentenced to two years in a military prison. See “Jail Soldier Signs Up Army”, Sunday People, 18 Jan. 1976.
mercenary “officers” on the African FNLA soldiers they were commanding. Desperately lacking in training, appropriate combat supplies and clear instructions, McAleese (1993) and the other British mercenaries were put straight to work fighting against the MPLA.

At the end of January 1976, split into two groups and under much media scrutiny, a contingent of close to 100 unsuspecting mercenaries left London to join McAleese’s advance party. For many of the mercenaries in Angola events on the ground quickly went from bad to worse. Various accounts detail specific points in the conflict when mercenaries, greatly outnumbered, were killed or wounded as they fought against the superior armed MPLA and Cuban forces. However, there is one stand alone incident that shocked and horrified people around the world, especially at home in Britain. Upon arrival, 23 of the men in the second contingent of mercenaries refused to fight, especially under the orders of the sadistic Costas Georgiou, claiming they had been deceived by Banks in London. These same men, while attempting to leave northern Angola and cross into Zaire by vehicle, mistakenly attacked a returning group of mercenaries (which included Georgiou), believing they were hostile advancing Cuban soldiers. Despite the fact it was a mistake, an enraged Georgiou took out his pistol from his holster and personally shot 23 year old compatriot Philip Davies after he had admitted firing the rocket that narrowly missed Georgiou’s vehicle. According to a number of firsthand accounts, Georgiou then ordered six fellow mercenaries to take the 13 other men away and execute them (see Burchett & Roebuck 1977, p. 102). Chillingly, these orders were obeyed.

The aggressive advancements of MPLA and Cuban forces eventually fractured the FNLA. This coupled with chaos and disorder from within their ranks, the mercenary force quickly disbanded. To avoid being captured or killed by MPLA or the Cubans most of the mercenaries, including Peter McAleese, managed to escape into neighbouring Zaire. Those who then returned safely to London in February spoke of the brutal civil war they had fought in. Their accounts shattered any romantic and misguided notions of adventure and financial fortunes. “The whole thing is a gigantic con trick”, complained former ex-Royal Air Force pilot Tom Chambers, “the

188 In November 1975 Cuba, as part of a Soviet-Cuban alliance, launched a full-scale military intervention in Angola to support the communist MPLA government against invasions by Zaire and South Africa aimed at destabilising the recently independent state (see chapter three).
189 For accounts of this incident as retold by the mercenaries themselves see Burchett and Roebuck (1977, pp. 94-115).
mercenary force is a bloody shambles” (Chambers cited in The World: Mercenaries: ‘A Bloody Shambles’ 1976). Those mercenaries who did not successfully escape before or after the conflict had ended on 19 February suffered quite different fates.

Sometime around the 11 February, 13 British and American mercenaries, including the wounded mercenary leader Georgiou, were captured on the battlefield by MPLA troops. The men were ordered to stand trial before a Peoples Revolutionary Tribunal commencing three months later in June.

By early February 1976 the British press was ablaze with disturbing stories leaking out of Angola. The Angolan mercenaries were receiving vast international media and political attention. It was, however, the June and July Luanda trial that truly dramatised the revived use of western mercenaries in Africa’s civil wars. With an international audience the communist MPLA government sought to ensure the legitimacy and fairness of the trial by appointing five eminent judges and inviting about 50 men and women from all over the world, most of them lawyers, to meet in Luanda and form an international Commission of Inquiry on mercenaries (see Burchett & Roebuck 1977). Once established the commission set up a committee to oversee the court hearing. All evidence and papers used in the trial were open to the committee (Burchett & Roebuck 1977). After nine days of deliberations the 13 mercenaries were found guilty of crimes against the people of Angola. Three Britons, including the notorious Costas Georgiou, and one American were executed by firing squad on 10 July 1976. The nine other defendants were given lengthy prison sentences ranging from 30 to 16 years.190 In the best traditions of Soviet show trials, the sentencing of mercenaries in Luanda conveyed to an international community that if western countries would not prevent their nationals from leaving their jurisdictions to fight as mercenaries abroad they would indeed be subjected to laws of foreign countries which deemed their activities illegal.

The Revival of Britain’s Mercenary Problem

The political turbulence stirred up in Angola led to further international calls for tighter more rigid regulations of mercenarism. African states continued to demand

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190 See Tickler (1987) for a detailed interview with Colin Evans who was one of the convicted mercenaries serving a 24-year sentence. In 1984 after years of ‘quiet diplomacy’ from the British government, Evans along with the other imprisoned mercenaries was released from Angola and repatriated to Britain.
that mercenarism become internationally outlawed. The OAU and UN became more forthright in their condemnations, reaffirming that eliminating mercenarism was a state responsibility (Musah & Fayemi 2000). Official records suggest the British government had been late in responding to the recruitment of mercenaries for Angola, doing so only when public and international pressure forced them to. On the 9 February 1976, 10 Downing Street began drafting a statement that Prime Minister James Callaghan “proposes to make [a speech] in the House of Commons tomorrow on the Recruitment of British mercenaries in Angola, and recent reports of alleged atrocities.”

The next day Prime Minister Callaghan told the House:

The organised recruitment of young men, many of them with no previous military experience, for service in Angola, and the subsequent reports of the tragic events which are alleged to have taken place there, must be a matter of deep concern to the Government, and people of this House.

“It is clearly essential that quick and thorough action,” he continued “should be taken to establish the facts surrounding the recruitment of these mercenaries and to prevent a recurrence.” In a further measure to alleviate the pressure mounting against the government, the Prime Minister also announced to the House that he was tabling a resolution to set up a joint select committee of privy counsellors chaired by Lord Diplock to form a commission of inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the recruitment of mercenaries from which they would make recommendations. As Stoler (2009, pp. 29-31) suggests was the case for earlier colonial commissions of inquiry, they were established as an attempt to quarantine “crisis,” risk and public scandal, but carried with them all the attendant anxieties, uncertainties and dilemmas of the events that gave rise to the need for regulation in the first place.

**Mercenary Provoked Tension**

In the months leading up to the Luanda trial, while the Diplock Committee were compiling their report, officials were concerned at the adverse effects threatening Britain’s position in Africa. The FCO was aware that circumstances surrounding the  

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193 Ibid.
Angolan mercenaries had somewhat “damaged the credibility in African eyes of our commitment to political solutions in Southern Africa.” African States were becoming more critical of what they saw as Britain’s soft response at preventing its citizens from threatening Africa’s stability and security – a perceived “manifestation of continued white interference.” Some voices in the international community implied Britain was tacitly supporting the involvement of mercenaries in Africa. In 1978 the Committee of Mozambique, Angola and Guiné Information Centre, London, sent the British government a letter reminding officials:

There is a substantial body of international opinion which is becoming convinced that mercenary recruitment is permitted by Western countries so that those countries can achieve by stealth what they can no longer achieve by open intervention.

Archived records surrounding mercenary events in 1976 also expose the deep diplomatic tensions between Britain and Angola. In standard diplomatic practise, as they had previously done for detained mercenaries in the Congo, the UK government was pushing to gain consular access to the British mercenaries who were on trial in Luanda. “Mercenary activities”, one member of the FCO recognised, “had seriously delayed normal relations with Angola.” Consular staff could not yet access the nine mercenaries held in custody. This provoked a level anxiety for some members in the FCO. One cable sent from British representatives in Luanda in June 1976 told the FCO, “we were given indication yesterday that a meeting with President Neto was unlikely.” Meanwhile, back in England mercenary recruiter, John Banks of “College town, Camberley” wrote to the FCO explaining how he was “arranging a Fund to provide legal representations for the Prisoners of War captured in the recent Angolan uprising.” There appears, however, to have been no official response to

199 Correspondence, J. E. Banks, College Town, Camberly to the Foreign Secretary’s Department, 13 May 1976.
his letter, suggesting that British officials were staying clear of Banks in an effort to foster diplomatic relations with the communist MPLA government of Angola.

The sensitivity with which Britain treated mercenary events in Angola is evident amongst FCO correspondence with UK representatives at the UN Diplomatic Conference on Humanitarian Law in Armed Conflict in May 1976. “The most important point to make to our delegation”, Martin Eaton of the UK mission to the UN told Mr Jarrold of the FCO, “is that they [delegates] should be careful not to be drawn in under any circumstances into discussion of the trial in Luanda which might be politically controversial.” The anxiety felt within government was exacerbated when the Angolan People’s Revolutionary Tribunal sentenced three of the British mercenaries to death. Prime Minister James Callaghan sent a personal message asking President Neto, on humanitarian grounds to exercise clemency towards the three British citizens sentenced to death. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury waded in to the drama, sending President Neto a personal message appealing that he “spare the lives of the condemned mercenaries” and “[P]lease show mercy.” It was not until 1978 that President Neto wrote to Queen Elizabeth thanking the government for taking “positive action in relation to the British mercenaries who have been recruited for aggressive acts against Angola which resulted in three British subjects being sentenced to death.”

The Diplock Committee and Definitions of “the Mercenary”

The Diplock enquiry explored the mercenary issue in its entirety. It accessed people and papers within legal, political, economic, military and commercial fields. On the 30 July 1976 the Prime Minister received a personal copy of the Diplock Committee’s report. Having read it he requested that “consideration of the report should begin immediately and that the Home Secretary should bring recommendations before the

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201 Prime Minister’s Personal message to President Neto (T39AC/76), 10 Downing Street, 2 July 1976, Civil War in Angola: Participation of British Mercenaries, PREM 16/1503, BNA, Kew, London.
202 Telegram No. 58, Donald, Archbishop of Canterbury to President Neto in Luanda, 6 July 1976, PREM 16/1503.
203 Correspondence, President Neto to the Queen, “Message to the Queen from President Neto”, 22 Feb. 1978, FCO 45/2226.
Overseas Defence and Policy Committee as soon as possible.” The Committee’s findings were precise and specific. The report essentially echoed the same overarching recommendations that had been put forward in both 1968 and again in 1970: current measures of regulation were “ineffective and unjustifiable” and new legislation was needed. Not long after Prime Minister Callaghan read the report it was published, presented to parliament and dispatched to all concerned government offices and departments. A three-page brief from the FCO was telegraphed to all British missions and posts overseas informing diplomats of the committee’s findings and recommendations. As the report began circulating the corridors of power, policy makers were pressed with the vexing task of resolving Britain’s increasing mercenary problem brought about by the events in Angola.

Commentators from the period, such as Burchett and Roebuck (1977), have critiqued the Diplock enquiry as being nothing more than a political strategy employed by the UK government to temporarily alleviate domestic and international pressure. They describe its findings as “woolly” and “open to doubt” (Burchett & Roebuck 1977, p. 240). Despite initially allowing the government to deflect political scrutiny, by publicising the enquiry as the first step of taking serious action against the recruitment of mercenaries in Britain, the enduring affects of the Diplock report were immense. The report continued to influence and trouble policy makers for months and years after its release. Its legacy is embodied in a series of archived folders simply titled “Diplock Committee,” some of which were closed as late as 1979. The report itself embodies the British government’s struggle against the adverse effects of mercenarism.

In these files Britain’s policy makers begin openly confronting and contesting the definition of the ‘mercenary.’ Although the government was already employing mercenary discourse, there was clear absence of any officially documented definition. Hitherto there had been a marked paucity of discussion surrounding the precise classification of mercenarism. The Diplock report provoked an ostensible move towards definitional clarity.

The ambiguity that characterised mercenary debates is evident in correspondence between government officials. On 5 August 1978 the “Second Legal

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Advisor”, J R Freeland, wrote to Mr Johnson of the West African Department concerning the FCO’s proposal of drafting new anti-mercenary legislation. The last paragraph of the two-page text reads as follows:

Incidentally, on quite a different point, I noticed looking through the file that in a minute of 28 February at folio 26 Mr Worsnop said that “British contract personnel in Persian Gulf States...are not ‘mercenaries’” and Mr Holding subsequently added “They are” [emphasis in original]. I am not sure what definition Mr Holding based his comment. The only definition of mercenary known to me to have been adopted so far in general multilateral agreement is that contained in Article 47 (2) of the 1977 first Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva conventions. In the negotiations at the Diplomatic Conference on Humanitarian Law in Armed Conflict which led to the adoption of that Protocol we took care to ensure that the definition does not [emphasis in original] cover British personnel who serve on contract as members of the armed forces of other States.206

Cast in the shadows of the state (Douglas 1987), Freeland’s correspondence identifies how British policy makers were themselves locked in disputes over the precise definition of mercenarism. By 1978 the term, as it was being used in Britain’s corridors of power, remained arbitrary. It is also apparent in Freeland’s comments that Britain had ensured that the UN’s categorisation of mercenarism would not jeopardise Britain’s contractual obligations to the militaries of its allies. British power brokers had applied enough political influence to give Britain an exit clause from the UN’s 1977 amendments to the Geneva Convention.

**British Soldiers in Rhodesia**

In the political aftermath of Angola, the Secretary-General of the UN wrote to David Owen, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, on 31 March 1978 drawing his attention to General Assembly resolution 32/14 of the 7 November 1977, entitled ‘Importance of the universal realization of the right of peoples to self-determination and of the speedy granting of independence to colonial countries and

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peoples for effective guarantee and observance of human rights.” The Secretary-General reminded Owen that in “operative paragraph 6 of its resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed that the practise of using mercenaries against national liberation movements and sovereign States constituted a criminal act and that the mercenaries themselves were criminals.” He pressed the British government for information on their progress towards enacting legislation prohibiting their nationals from serving as mercenaries. Yet policy makers in Whitehall were no closer to drafting any effective anti-mercenary laws than they had been in the late 1960s. Moreover, the Secretary-General’s request came at a time when white British nationals were being steadily recruited to fight for the Smith regime in Rhodesia’s civil war.

British authorities had become increasingly aware of the recruitment of British citizens into the Rhodesian army by late 1975. The British media were also following the story. After events in Angola, stories of alleged mercenaries travelling to Rhodesia became a hot topic in the press: “Rhodesians try to lure UK troops,” “UK Mercenaries say: we’ll join fight” and “British Mercenaries set to aid Rhodesia” were just some of the headlines in the press. On 19 July 1976 the nationally televised BBC Panorama programme ran an in-depth story on the recruitment of mercenaries for Rhodesia. The programme accused the Rhodesian army of “recruiting in shadowy and secret ways abroad, particularly in Britain.” The documentary seems to have taken the FCO by surprise. Days after its screening, transcripts of the Panorama programme were circulated through Whitehall and an official paper was compiled commenting on the programme. Government officials were particularly concerned with the targeted recruitment of British nationals. They focused their subsequent enquiries on the activities of Les Aspin, Roy Dovaston, Douglas Gordon-White and Paul Daniels, four men who were identified by the programme as

208 Ibid.
209 Ibid.
212 Kevin Murphy, “British mercenaries set to aid Rhodesia”, Evening Standard, 8 March 1976, FCO 65/1766.
213 Panorama on Recruitment of Mercenaries for Rhodesia, BBC Television 1, recorded on transmission, 19 Jul. 1976, FCO 65/1767.
214 Panorama on Recruitment of Mercenaries for Rhodesia, FCO 65/1767.
unofficial recruiters for the Rhodesian armed forces. The activities of Aspin and Dovaston had already been brought to the attention of the government, whereas security authorities began conducting investigations into the allegations made against Gordon-White and Daniels.²¹⁶

The documentary’s screening had fuelled the intent of British officials to quell what they promptly identified as an ominous front in their struggle against mercenary soldiering in Africa. Having read the Panorama transcript, Antony Duff of the FCO wrote to Mr Rumble of the Rhodesian desk suggesting:

We do have an opportunity to take action against the recruitment of mercenaries for Rhodesia; and since there are one or two straws now which could indicate a growing feeling that British mercenaries will start flooding towards Rhodesia, it would be very convenient if we could find a good reason to clobber Mr Les Aspin or one of the other recruiters at an early date.²¹⁷

Someone from the FCO had read Duff’s message and added the comment, “I think Aspin is too smart to be caught, but he is being closely monitored.”²¹⁸ Four days later Mr Rumble replied, informing Duff that the Director of Public Prosecutions had decided to proceed against Roy Dovaston with six specimen charges under the Southern Rhodesian Act 1968²¹⁹ and asked that police continue enquiries into White and Daniels.²²⁰

The British government were becoming increasingly aware of the “political damage” caused by mercenaries in Africa. The Diplock Committee recognised that in failing to act Britain was, in the eyes of African States, “at least condoning mercenary activities, if not using them as a disguised form of intervention” and a number of African governments would “regard official denials, unaccompanied by action, as

²¹⁸ “Rhodesia – Mercenary Activity”, FCO 36/1875.
²¹⁹ Paragraph 14 (1) (b) of the 1968 Southern Rhodesian Sanctions Act no. 2 order made it an offence, except under licence from the Minister, to do “any act calculated to solicit or encourage members of the public to take up employment or residence in Rhodesia.” A member of the legal department stated: “the recruitment activities highlighted in the Panorama programme are therefore clearly contrary to our legislation.” See P. W. Denison-Edson to Mr Taylor, Rhodesian Department, “‘Panorama’ Programme on Recruitment for Rhodesia”, 12 Aug. 1976, FCO 36/1875.
²²⁰ W. J. Rumble, Rhodesian Department, to Mr. Young, “Rhodesia: Recruitment”, 16 Aug. 1976, FCO 36/1875.
prevarication.”

Throughout 1976 the FCO was investigating the various methods used to illicitly recruit British citizens for Rhodesia. Complementary to the work of shadow agents like Aspin and Dovaston, were discreet advertisements placed in the British press. They required hopeful participants to reply in writing to an address located in South Africa. Another form of recruitment had previously targeted current serving members of the British armed forces by sending them unsolicited enlistment forms for the Rhodesian army. Media speculation alleged that the Smith regime was conducting a systematic recruiting campaign in Britain. Yet the FCO had “no evidence that a ‘network of Rhodesian agents’ in this country is organising the present recruiting drive.” Tom McCartney, a British citizen and deserter from the Rhodesian army, who appeared on the Panorama programme, alleged that the South African government were playing a hand in recruiting British nationals for the Rhodesian Security Services. Having been confronted by Britain, the South African government furiously denied any involvement. A subsequent investigation commissioned by the FCO found that the South African government’s claims were true. It was an individual who had an office in South Africa House who was responsible for dispatching and receiving Rhodesian recruiting documents for the Rhodesian army rather than a staff member of the South African Embassy.

222 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
Britain's “Solutions” to the Recruitment of Foreign Soldiers in Rhodesia

The government had moved fast in delegitimising those British citizens leaving to fight for Rhodesia by declaring them to be mercenaries. Yet with no effective anti-mercenary legislation in place they could not officially condemn such action as illegal mercenary practises. In fact, Mr Anthony Crosland, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, had conceded that in the UK it was “still not a crime to be a mercenary.” Therefore, rather than a legal classification, the government’s assertion of the term was politically, socially and culturally construed. Insufficient legal clarity and the subjective understandings surrounding categorisations of mercenarism were once again troubling policy makers who were trying to define the borders demarcating legitimate soldiering from illicit mercenary recruitment.

By 1976 Rhodesia was proving to be one of the more difficult cases in the UK’s mercenary affairs. The sheer scale of the problem is evident in the series of five files, listed from A to E, titled “Mercenaries and Recruitment for Rhodesia.” Within these files politicians, diplomats and state administrators relentlessly enquired, examined, debated, and re-examined other legal solutions to curb the enlistment of British subjects in the Rhodesian army. Determined to maintain at least some control over the situation, authorities jumped on opportunities to eliminate the shadowed channels of recruitment. On 20 March 1976, Richard Arlen Caylor, an American national, was refused entry into the UK when he arrived at Heathrow airport on flight SA232 from Johannesburg. The documents he was carrying led immigration officials to believe he was on a recruiting mission for the Rhodesian army. Under the Immigration Act 1971, and sanctioned by the Home Office, an Immigration Officer issued Caylor the following statement:

You have asked for leave to enter the United Kingdom for 40 days as a visitor, but I have reason to believe that you are a serving member of the armed forces of the illegal regime in Rhodesia, and in light of this, your exclusion is conducive to the public good.

Within a few hours of being refused entry into the UK he was sent back to Johannesburg on flight SA233.

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232 Ibid.
The UK government also denied passport facilities to suspected mercenaries seeking employment in Rhodesia. In March 1976 Mr Barry William Noakes from Harlow, Essex applied for a passport so he could leave England and travel to Rhodesia. Section 11 on page 4 of the application form required information on “Countries to be visited” and “Purpose of journey.” Rather surprisingly, Noakes answered: “Rhodesia” and “Mercenary Soldier.” The person at the Passport Office who was processing the application quickly referred it to Executive Officer Mr Aveyard who under the authority of the Home Office denied Noakes a British passport. Yet in both cases the closure of transit channels to potential mercenary agents were few and far between and was a matter of opportunity for British officials rather than a proactive measure of control. Such action proved to be infrequent and inconsistent and had very little real effect.

In a more extreme manoeuvre, aimed at deterring any potential British mercenaries leaving for Rhodesia, the government publicly threatened to invoke Section 3 of the Treason Felony Act 1884, punishable with life imprisonment.

What allowed officials to adopt this stance, as specified in an FCO paper, was the fact “Rhodesian armed forces are not ‘forces of the Crown’ but forces serving an illegal regime in rebellion against the Crown.” On 21 May 1976 one “concerned” man – a British citizen who “lived for some time in Israel” and “was a member of the Israeli army” – had got his solicitor at Leo Abse & Cohen to write to the Home Office on his behalf asking whether he would be found guilty of treason should he follow through with his plans to join the Rhodesian army. Receiving no reply Leo Abse & Cohen wrote a follow up letter one month later. A memo in the archives notes that an official reply was finally sent on 16 July 1976. Yet there is no copy on record of the Home Office’s response.

Not everyone in Whitehall was convinced about the applicability of the Treason Felony Act. Responding to a draft memorandum on “Mercenaries for

234 Ibid.
239 Ibid.
Rhodesia: HMG position”, deputy legal advisor A.R. Rutherford wrote, “in my view Rhodesian mercenaries and their organisers are not engaged in activities which should sustain charges of treason or incitement to treason and therefore see no likelihood of successful prosecutions for such offences.” 241 Yet, once again there were discrepancies in the response of government administrators to the measures controlling mercenarism.

In March 1976, P.J. Hurr of the Rhodesian Department wrote to Mr Rumble of the FCO stating:

In view of our present problem of “warning off” mercenaries intending to go to Rhodesia can we not work into our line on mercenaries…the idea that if British mercenaries do go to Rhodesia and are known to have killed, wounded or assaulted people there, they are likely if nothing else to find themselves charged with murder, grievous bodily harm etc on their return to here [Britain]. 242

With the legal division’s approval the government recognised that “killing in the service of the illegal regime might, depending on circumstances, amount to murder or manslaughter. United Kingdom citizens who commit manslaughter or murder abroad are liable to prosecution under the laws of this country.”243 In October 1976 British authorities received reports identifying a British subject who killed an insurgent while serving in Rhodesia. After a British police enquiry, and having consulted the Attorney General, the director of public prosecutions decided “no charge of murder can be based on the evidence presently available.”244

The British government’s attempts at “warning off” its citizens from enlisting in the Rhodesian army proved ineffective. Men like Peter McAleese who served in the Rhodesian SAS had left the UK with the sole purpose of fighting for the Smith regime in the Rhodesian bush war (McAleese 1993). Yet it was not just British nationals being recruited; so too were subjects from other Commonwealth countries. As events in Angola and Rhodesia were overlapping in 1976, the mercenary problem had also spread throughout the Commonwealth, most notably to New Zealand, Australia and Canada. No longer was dealing with the problem the entire responsibility of Britain. As reports of foreigners leaving for Rhodesia became more frequent these

241 A.R. Rutherford to FCO, [date illegible], FCO 36/1875.
Commonwealth allies worked together in attempting to curb the participation of their citizens in Rhodesia’s civil war.

New Zealand and the Mercenary Problem

“There has been considerable interest here in a ‘Panorama’ programme about the recruitment of forces for Rhodesia in which it was alleged that New Zealanders were being recruited into the Rhodesian army,” the British High Commissioner in Wellington, New Zealand reported to the Rhodesian Department in a telegram dated 30 July 1976. “The New Zealand government” he confirmed, “is aware that a small number of New Zealanders are going to Rhodesia. Their enquiries suggest there is very little that the New Zealand government can do.” By this time Britain and New Zealand were, through diplomatic channels, starting to work more closely at monitoring the recruitment and service of their citizens in Rhodesia. However, the first signs of New Zealand’s concern towards the disordered practise of mercenary soldiering can be traced back to the Angolan debacle and the early stages of the Diplock enquiry. When in talks with the FCO in February 1976, members from the New Zealand High Commission in London questioned references made in an article from *The Times* newspaper that a New Zealander was amongst the Angolan mercenaries. The FCO, however, “could throw no light on it.” Meanwhile, the Diplock Committee had pointed out that unlike Australia and Canada, New Zealand had no legislative powers to control mercenary activities. For this reason, coupled with miscellaneous reports of New Zealand citizens fighting in Angola, authorities in Wellington began making enquiries about the “British approach to legal aspects of the mercenary issue.” Certain documents within Britain’s official records reveal that

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246 Ibid.
248 For an official report on mercenary prohibition legislation in other countries see M.E. Heath to A. Duff, “Diplock Committee on Mercenaries”, encl. “Legislation on Mercenaries in Certain Other Countries”, 17 Dec. 1976, FCO 36/1875. By 1977 Australia was passing the Crimes (Foreign Incursions and Recruitment) Bill. This made it an offence to recruit a person in Australia to serve in any capacity with an armed force in a foreign country. It also made it an offence to publish an advertisement-recruiting people for service in a foreign force (Burmester 1978, p. 53).
the FCO, throughout the remainder of the Rhodesian civil war, was keeping well informed on New Zealand’s response to the mercenary problem.  

However, it is important to consider that New Zealand’s official position on mercenaries in Africa was limited by the government’s approach to foreign policy. The conservative National government of New Zealand (1975 to 1984), had adopted, in the words of Prime Minister Robert Muldoon “a low profile stance in foreign policy.”  

“Our foreign policy is trade”, he told Derek Round in a 1979 interview for the New Zealand International Review. “We are not interested in the normal foreign policy matters to any great extent” Muldoon went on to say. This approach had a strong bearing on New Zealand’s foreign policy towards mercenaries in Africa. The participation of New Zealand soldiers in Africa was not such a pressing issue at a time when the government was making it clear to “senior officials, both in defence and foreign affairs and indeed one or two other departments” that trade was to dominate New Zealand’s foreign policy. Albeit to a much lesser extent than Britain, the New Zealand government was by 1975 drawn into Africa’s mercenary problem.

New Zealand and the Official Shadows of Mercenarism in Africa

On the 15 March 1975, Mr M. Broadbent posted a typed letter from Gwelo, Rhodesia addressed to the “Rt. Hon. Robert Muldoon”, Prime Minister of New Zealand. “Congratulations on winning the election and becoming the Prime Minister of our dear country”, opened M.R.M Broadbent. What proceeded was a judicious, articulately written and politically motivated appeal for New Zealand “to play a real part in changing the attitude and approach of the World and Britain and the UN, in particular, to the solving of the issues in Rhodesia.” This epistle provoked


251 Robert Muldoon, interviewed by Derek Round, Wellington, New Zealand International Review (Wellington), January/February 1980, p. 3.

252 Ibid.

253 Ibid.


255 Ibid.

256 Ibid.
considerable anxiety amongst officials in both the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, due not just to its content but rather the activities of its author. The official anxiety provoked by Broadbent’s advocacy for Rhodesia and his grounded service in the country’s military forces, mirrors the affect (Stoler 2009) of the documented diplomatic correspondence that saturates the file.

Flight Lieutenant M.R.M. Broadbent J85085 was a qualified medical doctor, pilot and Officer in the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) General Reserve (medical branch), “with a current reserve obligation expiring September 1988.” In 1975 he had moved to Rhodesia and, according to official intelligence reports, taken up active service in the “bush squadron” of the country’s air force. Writing to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Lieutenant-General Webb, the Chief of Defence Staff, pointed out that Broadbent’s military service in Rhodesia “is inconsistent with his oath of allegiance” and there is “no alternative but to recommend that the Governor-General cancel his commission.” In his request to the Secretary for further information surrounding Broadbent’s activities, Webb concluded “you will no doubt wish to be aware of the position in regard to this officer and will be as anxious as we are to confirm or deny his alleged service with the Rhodesian Air Force.”

Seven days later, on 20 February 1976, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs sent a telegram to the New Zealand High Commissioner in London requesting the High Commission “attempt to ascertain through any contacts you might have whether Flight Lieutenant Broadbent is in fact serving with the Southern Rhodesian forces.” According to the Secretary, Broadbent’s activities, if proven accurate, would “cause embarrassment to the Government.” The High Commissioner in London confirmed to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in Wellington, “Barlow (Rhodesian Department FCO) has indicated that they may well be able to assist in ascertaining whether

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258 Ibid.
262 Ibid.
Broadbent is serving in Rhodesia.”

Having established this was indeed the case, acting Prime Minister B. E. Talboys wrote to Broadbent on April 14, 1976 telling him “while your action in writing to the Prime Minister is appreciated I must frankly say that the circumstances under which you are in Rhodesia give rise to grave concern.” Talboys then told the Flight Lieutenant he had “no option but to recommend to the Governor-General that your commission should be cancelled.” Broadbent’s actions, as assured by the acting Prime Minister, had put the New Zealand government in a position where they could not, in Talboys words, “turn a blind eye.”

While dealing with the isolated case of Broadbent, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs was becoming more attuned to the mercenary problem plaguing British politicians and diplomats. On 27 February 1976 the New Zealand High Commissioner to the UK enclosed in a telegram the text of a letter addressed to the British MP, Reginald Maudling, from David Ennals, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. This disclosed the government’s intention to withdraw passports from the first group of Angolan mercenaries returning to the UK. Further correspondence between Wellington and London included extracts from debates on mercenaries in the House of Commons and the British Prime Minister’s decision to establish the Diplock Enquiry. According to a British official close to him, the New Zealand High Commissioner in London was checking whether this contact “can make available to us documents relating to the setting up of the Diplock enquiry.”

One month later a two page handwritten document titled “Angola: Mercenaries” arrived at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It informed readers that the Diplock enquiry attends to the mercenary question in its “historical context – in Africa, Middle East and elsewhere – paying specific attention to Foreign Enlistment Act 1870.” It also explained that “Rhodesia being a ‘colony’ was different and so the Act did not

263 Ibid.
264 Ibid.
265 Brian Talboys to Mr. Broadbent, 14 April 1976, ABHS 950, Acc. W4627, 4003/245/4/64.
apply.” Authorities in Wellington were by this time growing aware that New Zealand was also a potential recruiting ground for soldiers heading to Rhodesia.

New Zealand Soldiers and Rhodesia

Throughout 1976 and 1977 the New Zealand press began running stories on local men enlisting for the Rhodesian Security Services. “100 Want to Serve in Rhodesia” and “NZers Sign up to Fight for Smith’s Rhodesia,” were headlines in the *Evening Post* and “Scores of N.Z. Men Enlist in Rhodesia” read *The Press* in Christchurch. It became widely publicised that Mr. Harry Sykes, a school caretaker in Napier, was attempting to recruit New Zealanders into the Rhodesian Army. This gripped the attention of not only New Zealand’s authorities but Britain’s too. Sykes had been placing advertisements in newspapers in New Zealand’s main cities, such as the one that appeared in the *Dominion Post* public notices on 21 October 1977:

RHODESIA needs you now. Financially plus emigrants write to H Sykes, 6 Spencer Rd. Napier.

Those who wrote to Sykes expressing an interest to emigrate to Rhodesia received letters by “second-class airmail post-marked ‘Salisbury’”, containing “a thick green folder entitled ‘The Rhodesian Army offers more’” in which army recruiting forms were enclosed. This illicit recruiting campaign occurred in an era of rising, sudden and (for a generation), unprecedented unemployment. In January 1977, Sykes claimed he had “received more than 30 applications in one week” since his advertisement had appeared in various New Zealand newspapers.

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270 Ibid.
277 “Scores” of N.Z. Men Enlist in Rhodesia”, FCO 36/1876.
With the real possibility that New Zealanders were being “recruited into mercenary forces fighting in Africa” the question had arisen as to measures of control the New Zealand government had over its citizens for service abroad as alleged mercenaries. It was clear to government officials in Wellington there were no legal mechanisms at the government’s disposal to regulate mercenarism since the 1870 Foreign Enlistment Act had ceased to apply in 1962 when the New Zealand Crimes Act 1961 had come into effect. When the Geneva Convention protocol 1, Article 47 was voted in on 8 June 1977, the New Zealand government decided that new anti-mercenary legislation was required. A telegram dispatched from Wellington on 17 August 1977 told High Commissions, Embassies and diplomatic missions in London, Ottawa, Washington and Canberra:

We had hoped to deal with the mercenary situation by amendment to the existing regulations also, but the parliamentary counsel concluded that such an amendment would be ultra vires (2 U/L) to the United Nations Act under which the regulations are promulgated and not stand up to the challenge in the courts. New legislation on mercenaries is therefore the only solution and the minister has instructed that this be prepared.

Yet MFA files consulted from the New Zealand Archives revealed a paucity of documents pertaining to discussions and debates surrounding proposals for legislation prohibiting mercenarism. This may suggest that policy makers in Wellington did not engage or consider the topic any further than had already been discussed.

As the war in Rhodesia intensified during 1978, and the beleaguered Smith regime sought fresh recruits to bolster the ranks of its armed forces, New Zealand became more direct in its official stance and course of action towards the recruits. New Zealand’s approach to foreign soldiers in Rhodesia is best captured in an excerpt from “Mercenaries: Question and Answers Proposal for Foreign Minister B.E. Talboys to use on T.V. I” on 12 September 1978. It reads as follows:

279 Ibid.
281 Ibid.
Question: Why has the Government not enacted legislation to prevent New Zealand citizens going to Rhodesia?
Answer: The possibility of enacting legislation has been examined very closely but the Government holds doubts about the effectiveness of any legislation aimed at preventing persons participating in overseas conflicts.

Question: What are these doubts?
Answer: There are very complex legal issues involved. The Diplock Report in the United Kingdom made us aware of some of them as they might affect New Zealand. Let me give you a couple of examples. There is first the difficulty of defining a mercenary. A mercenary is generally regarded as someone who volunteers, for monetary reward, to fight for or in a foreign country. But in many cases monetary reward is not the sole, or indeed the real motivation. Many volunteers have participated in foreign wars for political or ideological reasons, the most notable example being the Spanish civil war. The second concern is the traditional freedom of movement of New Zealanders. We need to be very careful about any erosion of this freedom. It is also a freedom that should be observed throughout the world.283

There are two levels from which New Zealand recognised the problems associated with passing legislation prohibiting mercenarism. First is the difficulty in defining a mercenary and second, encroaching on the freedoms of an individual to leave one’s country. The answers given by Talboy’s suggest the New Zealand government was attuned to the deep complexity of the mercenary problem. Sources provided in Ministry of Foreign Affairs records suggest New Zealand officials understood mercenaries as illegitimate military practitioners, disordered and politically problematic. However, they also recognised that the same persons classified as mercenaries, could also be volunteer soldiers participating in foreign conflicts for non-monetary reasons. In their view they were New Zealand soldiers fighting abroad.

283 Ibid.
Conclusion

The shadows of war are vast in their catchments. As this thesis has argued, foreign soldiers who left their countries of origin to fight in Africa’s conflicts during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s operated within the ambiguous spaces of these shadows. By reconceptualising and expanding Nordstrom’s (2004) work, this research has shown that the subjective experiences of soldiers fighting in Africa can remain hidden in the shadows of war. Through an anthropological perspective, which draws on the ethnohistory of the archives and fieldwork, I have examined different paradigms, political processes, representations, and human practises of mercenarism in Africa between 50 and 30 years ago.

In an effort to move away from a mere reconstruction of the ‘mercenary’ phenomenon in Africa and understand why young men left their countries of origin, homes and families to fight in Africa’s civil wars and the subsequent reaction of the state, this thesis has used a multistranded ethnography. In doing so, it has woven together oral testimonies, written accounts and participant observation – three distinct bodies of anthropological knowledge in their own right. Ethnographic work in the archives allowed me to examine the mercenary problem from official British and New Zealand perspectives. As rich repositories of data, information and narratives, government records revealed the political processes and consequences arising from the activities of freelance soldiers who operated in the murky spaces of the shadows where the illicit, illegitimate and the legal intersect in nuanced ways. To complement these official records I conducted interviews and participant observation with former soldiers who fought in Africa and who now live in New Zealand. Through their testimonies I was able to capture the more intimate details of their lives and subjective experiences of fighting in various African conflicts during decolonisation. This thesis
has, in essence, investigated what happens when the worlds of diplomacy and politics clashed with the disorder of freelance combatants in Africa.

As this research reveals, the shadows of mercenarism are also highly contested. Within these shadow spaces definitions, meanings and understandings of the ‘mercenary’ are imposed, contested and rejected. It was the widespread international condemnation during the 1970s, in direct response to mercenary events in Africa, which led to the first official multilateral efforts by the UN and OAU to classify and categorise mercenarism. These definitions were used as templates to encourage national governments to pass their own anti-mercenary legislation. These templates, however, are riven with spaces, making their definitions porous, flexible and ambiguous. The former foreign soldiers I interviewed, with the exception of a few, moved between these shadow spaces in ways that allowed them to disrupt and dispute being officially categorised as mercenaries. During the interviews, the majority of veteran combatants rejected the label mercenary and went on to assert their legitimacy as soldiers as a result of their professionalism, discipline, standardised pay rates, acquired citizenship and codes of military ethics. Not only did these men position themselves outside the definitional boundaries of the ‘mercenary’ but several interviewees openly moved back and forth across the borders of legitimate soldiering and illicit mercenary practises. By using the UN and OAU guidelines and frameworks, this thesis has argued that official classifications of mercenarism, rather than being precise, objective and universal, are instead socially, culturally and politically contingent.

The participation of British and Commonwealth mercenaries in the conflicts which broke out in the Congo, Nigeria, Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Namibia (South West Africa) created a “problem” for government officials in Britain and, to a lesser extent, New Zealand. From an official perspective, freelance soldiers in Africa embodied a sense of ambiguity, uncertainty and disorder. This vexed British policy makers throughout the 1960s and 1970s as they continued to assess, debate and grapple with the difficulties of regulating mercenary activities. Yet on another level, officials in Britain were also troubled by the mercenary dilemma: legislating against mercenarism meant jeopardising their own legitimate use of “mercenaries” such as Irish and Gurkha soldiers employed in the British defence force and the contracting of British army officers into Sultan of Oman’s armed forces. Government records revealed that Britain had an intensely contradictory relationship
with soldiers which it labelled ‘mercenaries.’ In some circumstances the participation of British and Commonwealth ‘mercenaries’ in Africa was perceived as being helpful to Britain’s interests and foreign policies, such as the Congo and Nigeria. The mercenary problem had much less effect over New Zealand’s national interests and did not constitute the same level of critical attention as in Britain. The New Zealand government could afford to be more forthright in its condemnation of its citizens who left to fight in Africa. Their interests in the continent were largely limited to controversial sporting ties in South Africa and maintaining a neutral position with recently independent African countries. Despite the foreign minister declaring in 1977 that new anti-mercenary legislation was being drafted, the official records I accessed suggest this was never passed by parliament. The reasons remain unknown. As this thesis has shown, when the worlds of diplomacy and politics intersect with mercenaries they give rise to complex, ambiguous and disordered spaces that make government regulation an exceedingly difficult task.

The lived experiences of former foreign soldiers who participated in this research were rich in similarities and diversities. Their stories have been socially, culturally and politically marginalised and have remained almost entirely in their own shadows. This is partly due to the fact that the African conflicts they fought in, unlike the Vietnam or Falkland Islands wars, did not provoke enough widespread public reaction in Britain and New Zealand. Furthermore, conflicts involving mercenaries only appealed to a niche market of trained and often experienced combatants from “western” countries who became actively involved in the violence for their own individual reasons. Nonetheless, narratives from oral histories and archives offered a valuable body of anthropological knowledge. The collation and analysis of this knowledge provides unique insights into the cultures of ‘mercenary’ soldiers in Africa. Although mercenary events discussed in this thesis occurred between 30 and 50 years ago, cultures of mercenarism are not fixed, static or rigid but remain dynamic, fluid and contingent in time, space and place. The majority of veteran soldiers I interviewed for this research had recognised the changes that have occurred in their physical and social environments, contemporary global politics, personal experiences and elapsing of time had, to varying extents, affected their perspectives and memories of fighting in Africa’s wars. Their participation in these conflicts cannot be understood as isolated cases but instead they must be examined amongst the wider
social and political processes, straddling the divides between the politics of ‘race,’
decolonisation and Cold War rivalries.

**Future Research Avenues**

As I embarked on this study I soon realised there were myriad ways to approach the
topic. My initial experience in the British National Archives in Kew had given the
project an historical angle, allowing me to narrow the research scope. Yet the further
into the research process I got the more I started becoming aware of the immense
bodies of ethnographic knowledge I was dealing with. Time spent in both the national
archives of Britain and New Zealand revealed a plethora of official documents
pertaining to mercenaries in Africa. Yet there is still a vast amount of analysis to be
done in the archives. This is not just isolated to Britain and New Zealand but can
extend to other Commonwealth countries such as Australia and Canada along with the
US and the African countries where these conflicts were fought. Gleijeses’s (1994)
work on America’s diplomacy in the Congo during the intervention of European
mercenaries between 1964 and 1965 shows that official US government records
provide a rich site for ethnographic information surrounding conflict and foreign
mercenaries in Africa. Moreover, in her work on the last years of Britain’s colonial
rule in Kenya, Elkins (2005) illuminates the value in drawing from multiple records,
including 20 different archives and libraries in Britain, the US and Kenya. Her work
also reveals the importance in combining written records with oral testimonies,
forging necessary links between different ethnographic knowledges.

This research topic has the potential to also be expanded through more
extensive fieldwork. Although the foreign soldiers I interviewed provide a uniquely
New Zealand thread throughout this study, they were relatively small in numbers.
Throughout the duration of this research I encountered evidence that foreign soldiers
who fought in Africa’s conflicts between the 1960s and 1980s are still alive and living
in various countries overseas, including Britain, Australia, US, Canada, Europe and
parts of Africa. Take for instance, an American veteran of the Rhodesian civil war
who informed me, through personal correspondence in April 2010, that there are some
450 other American soldiers who fought in the bush war, and a number of them were
still alive (Personal Correspondence, April 2011). Furthermore, some of the men I
spoke to while on fieldwork suggested I should “get in touch” with friends and/or former comrades who they served alongside in Africa. On several occasions they provided me with exact names and contact addresses. One interviewee told me that he would contact “Dave,” a veteran of three African conflicts during the 1970s and 1980s and who now lives in Australia. Early in the research process I discovered a global network of former soldiers who were all connected through organisations that communicated through the Internet and email. This provided an excellent opportunity to contact and correspond with veterans. However, the majority of these men resided outside of New Zealand. Time, resourcing and funding constraints prevented me from conducting in-person interviews with them. To include their oral testimonies would be valuable contributions to understanding the human experiences behind freelance soldiering in Africa during decolonisation.

There are many different approaches that could have been taken to this research. These also include considering the perspectives of rebel and nationalist insurgents who fought against mercenaries in these conflicts and also the citizen soldiers who served alongside foreign combatants. Another fascinating angle, that needs to be addressed, are the activities of Soviet and Cuban military personnel who fought for black African liberation movements, such as the East German paratroopers serving in the MPLA in 1978 (see McClure, Willers & Barratt 1978). The indigenous and white settler civilian populations who were caught in these conflicts would also provide valuable perspectives on ‘mercenaries’ even if they reject the validity of this term. All these narratives would be both insightful and provide balance and diversity to the representations of mercenary conflict in Africa. As Schmidt and Schröder (2001) remind us, conflict and violence are key features of society that are understood and represented differently by perpetrators, victims, and observers as well as by winners and losers in war. However, any research must work within some kind of theoretical, conceptual and thematic parameters. There is only so much that can be covered in one thesis. Attention to the participation of mercenary soldiers in Africa’s conflicts during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s opens up an immense range of potential research avenues. Whether the topic is approached in methodologically, theoretically or thematically different ways it is worthy of further critical examination.

It has been over 30 years since the mercenary conflicts, discussed in this thesis, have occurred (as of 2010-2011; the time of writing). The security situation in Africa continues to be dogged by political volatility and frequent outbreaks of violence.
Commercial PSCs have expanded across Africa at an astonishing rate, offering a multitude of specialist security services. The market for private security has developed to the extent that by 2004 estimates indicated there were 2000 PSCs operating in Kenya alone (Wairagu, Kamenju & Singo 2004, p. 45) and 1500 to 2000 PSCs in Nigeria, employing in excess of 100,000 people (Abrahamsen & Williams 2007, p. 137). Unequivocally, PSCs now play a vital role in Africa’s contemporary security situation.

**Contemporary Reflections: PSCs and Mercenarism**

It is commonplace amongst some writers, political and media critics to suggest that PSCs are inextricably linked to the *ad hoc* or ‘vagabond’ mercenaries who plagued the continent between 1960 and 1980. Over recent years a growing body of literature considering the involvement of PSCs in Africa has emerged (Howe 1998; Cleaver 2000; Dietrich 2000; Musah & Fayemi 2000; O’Brien 2000; Møller 2002; Muthien & Taylor 2002; Selber & Jobarteh 2002; Abrahamsen & Williams 2007; Bearpark & Schulz 2007; Gumedez 2007; Gama 2008). A large proportion of this work has observed the profound change in organisational structure and activities of PSCs from foreign mercenaries who intervened in Africa’s civil wars during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. However, conceptualising PSCs as a form of contemporary mercenarism remains a contentious, highly contested and ambiguous approach. From my research experiences, including time spent in West Africa and London, PSCs are quick to reject being classified as (corporate) mercenary organisations. For instance, a director from one of Britain’s largest PSCs told me in an interview in late June 2010, “PSCs in Africa often gets the media tag of being mercenary outfits” (Interview, London, June 2010). He was quick to mention that his company, and others like them, “are far removed from the mercenary forces in the Congo and all that chaos during decolonisation” (Interview, London, June 2010). In this case, he uses the term mercenary and its evocations of rogue foreigners who fought in Africa between the 1960s and 1980s as a point of conceptual differentiation. His comments also resonate with the narratives of the former foreign soldiers I interviewed for this research. They too rejected being classified as mercenaries and positioned themselves outside the definitional boundaries of the term ‘mercenary.’
These contestations over the term mercenary have allowed me to reflect upon the linkages between this thesis and the involvement of PSCs in contemporary Africa. The heart of the issue reverts back to a discussion I had with Andrew Bearpark, the Director-General of the BAPSC in July 2010. He posed the question on whether PSCs are a separate and parallel phenomenon to mercenaries who fought in Africa during 1960s – 1980s or whether they are a “different branch that comes from the same tree” (Name used with permission: Interview, Westminster, London, June 2010). Certainly, the topic cannot been examined in isolation from the conflicts and mercenary events that occurred during decolonisation. Moreover, this presents an important avenue for future anthropological research: exploring the practises of military personnel who are currently employed within the private security industry. The American marine, whose encounters with contract soldiers in Iraq helped open the introduction of this thesis, raises questions on whether personnel working for these contemporary PSCs represent the disorder, uncertainty and ambiguous crossings of the shadows as their antecedents had during the 1960s and 1970s.

The emergence of market driven multinational PSCs and their prevalence in conflicts around the world has made attempts to classify and categorise mercenarism an even more difficult task than it was nearly half a decade ago. The range of people and activities now classified as ‘mercenary’ has expanded and diversified considerably. Contemporary examples include the 64 foreign soldiers involved in the 2004 botched military coup in Equatorial Guinea and the case of Hamish Sands, a New Zealander captured by the rebel “New Forces” in Cote D’Ivoire, who allegedly offered his “services to President Laurent Gbagbo as a hired killer” (Conway 2005). Furthermore, the 1500 Fijian soldiers who were hired in 2005 by PSCs to serve in Iraq (see Cameron 2006, p. 582) and the 800 foreign soldiers currently being employed by the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi as a “secret” battalion in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have also been categorised as mercenaries (see Mazzetti & Hager 2011).

Despite anti-mercenary legislation being proposed by the New Zealand Foreign Minister in 1977, it was not until 2004 that New Zealand passed the Mercenary Activities (Prohibition) Act making it an offence to recruit, use, finance or train mercenaries, or participate in a war or act of violence as a mercenary. Britain, however, has not yet passed any anti-mercenary legislation. In Whitehall, politicians and government officials are still debating (as of 2011) amongst themselves how to define mercenarism. In terms of anti-mercenary legislation, these debates share
synergies with policy options considered in the 1970s. The problem facing legislators is that “precise” definitions of mercenary activity are susceptible to shadow spaces that can be exploited by individuals and organisations. Contemporary classifications of mercenarism remain socially, culturally and politically contingent.

Discourses of “the Mercenary”: Power, legitimacy and contemporary conflict

Just as mercenaries were active during the 1960s and 1970s, they have surged back into public prominence in the 2011 uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East. In what has become known as the “Arab Spring,” this civil unrest, involving peaceful demonstrations en masse, is in direct response to unpopular regimes which are the legacies of colonialism and decolonisation. To date, nearly all of the public dissent has been met with repressive state violence. Mass protests, however, have resulted in the collapse of governments in Tunisia, Egypt and, in October 2011, Libya. In some cases governments have tried clinging to power through the recruitment and deployment of mercenaries. From the first days of the Libyan uprising, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi employed foreign soldiers from neighbouring African countries – including Chad, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and Sudan – along with white South Africans and Eastern Europeans (Martinovic 2011; Sengupta 2011; Smith 2011). The international community condemned this practise of using foreign soldiers against Libyan citizens as a last desperate and brutal attempt at remaining in power. This condemnation was assisted by media coverage of the nomadic Tuareg people’s from Mali (and across the Sahel) who were alleged to have been paid $US 10,000 each to join pro-Gaddafi forces and then $US 1,000 a day to fight (Vogl 2011). These accounts were effective at characterising Gaddafi’s recruitment of foreign soldiers as an illegitimate and disordered mercenary force, lured into fighting by the promise of payment in cash or gold.

By contrast, the Kingdom of Bahrain, a “reliable” and “steady” western ally in the Persian Gulf, with all the trappings of a democratic state (while arguably lacking most of the substance), has been actively recruiting Pakistani soldiers into its armed forces who have been used to violently suppress widespread Shia protests (see Mashal 2011). In July 2011, Mashal (2011) reported that 2,500 former Pakistani servicemen now make up 50 percent of those serving in Bahrain’s National Guard and Special
Forces military units. Leading into the civil unrest and public demonstrations against the royal family, the media were also initially labelling Bahrain’s employment of Pakistani troops as a desperate act of recruiting mercenaries. This was quickly abandoned as Bahrain reasserted its legitimacy by continuing to present itself as a “normal” state and a strong ally of the US and Britain. As a result, the government of Bahrain has been able to legitimise and normalise its recruitment of soldiers from Pakistan. They have become ‘foreign soldiers’ in the Bahraini army. The case of Bahrain is, in essence, exactly what Gaddafi was doing in Libya, except one is a legitimate army while the other is a disordered and illicit mercenary force.

Bahrain’s ability to maintain its legitimacy while actively recruiting foreigners into its security forces and then using them against its own citizens hinges on the power of its western allies to politically determine what is and is not mercenarism. This resonates with Britain’s diplomatic policies on mercenaries in the 1960s and 1970s when they selectively used the term “mercenary” to declare foreigners serving in Africa’s conflicts as illegitimate and illicit soldiers depending on what side they were fighting for. The significance of the Arab Spring is in the way it reveals a powerful reconfiguration of the political processes that played out in Africa’s mercenary conflicts between 1960 and 1980. Recent events in Libya and Bahrain confirm that the international trade in mercenaries has continued to flourish in the shadows of war.
References


