BOOK REVIEWS

On military culture: Theory, practice and African armed forces
(UCT Press, Cape Town 2013, 280 pp. ISBN 978-1-77582-066-6)

Francois Vrey, Abel Esterhuyse *&* Thomas Mandrup (eds.)

Bheki R Mngomezulu
International & Public Affairs (IPA) Cluster [Politics]
University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College)
kizulu@yahoo.com

The theme of the book *On Military culture* is encapsulated in the title. Its focus is on how military culture has evolved over time and in different contexts. This is in response to the evident lacuna in the existing literature whereby the theme has either been wittingly or unwittingly ignored in African history or has been addressed by those residing outside of the African continent. The book was triggered by a conference which was hosted by the Danish-South Africa academic partnership in the Faculty of Military Science at Stellenbosch University in 2011. The broad aim of the conference was "to highlight the nature of military culture from a scientific perspective" (p. xv). Its specific dual aim was: (i) to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives from the international community; and (ii) to scrutinize the institutional culture of the South African military as it has unfolded since 1994 (p. xv).

In essence, this book demonstrates the role played by culture in both the nature and overall make-up of armed forces. While not refuting the fact that culture evolves over time and the reality that each nation-state has its own way of setting up and running its armed forces, the book makes a valid point that there is a "military culture" which cuts across the geographical divide. In other words, despite apparent differences on how the armed forces are established and run by national governments, there are blatant similarities that can be discerned.

Structurally, the book is well organised. There has been a conscious attempt in the first part to tackle the theme from a broader theoretical perspective (except for Chapter 4 which focuses on Canada and draws on research conducted specifically in the Canadian context to examine the relations between the armed forces and the Canadian society) (p. 67). This gives the authors the leeway to cite various examples from different countries over time and discuss how military culture has evolved and which factors influenced the direction it took at any given time. Having achieved this goal, the second part of the book (from Chapter 6) uses specific country case studies to expound the broader theme and show through empirical evidence how the theoretical assumptions presented in the first five chapters have worked on the ground. It is in this context that the authors aver that: "This publication explores the military-cultural nexus from a broad strategic outlook and a narrower national and institutional angle, and from an international as well as an African perspective (p. xxi)."

There are several theoretical arguments that are presented in chapters 1 to 5. Amongst these is the acknowledgement of the fact that violence and the use of force is not something new amongst humans. On the contrary, "from the earliest beginnings, violence and coercion have been features of the human condition" (p. 1). According to this trajectory, what has changed over time is the nature and extent of such violence and coercion. The second argument is that in general, the military way of life is distinct from the way in which civil society lives. Implicit in this submission is that the behaviour of the armed forces is bound to differ from that of the civil society because there is a "culture" that the army should and must uphold. Accordingly, Dandeker introduces his chapter by saying: "I explore the distinctiveness of the military way of life and its culture relative to that of the civilian world" (p. 35).

Linked to the above are several assumptions which are presented by McKinley as facts. Included in this list of assumptions are the following: civilisation is founded on violence; political collectivities which emphasise self-interest and collective egoism are inherently brutal; a nation is a group of people united by a common mistake regarding its origins and a collective hostility towards its neighbours; nationalism is a community of blood; we [as humans] are all embedded in violence and, to a greater or lesser extent, benefit from it; government is impossible without a religion (pp. 88-89). Inherent in these assumptions is that there is a way in which the efficacy of the geographical divide could be reduced or entirely annulled by these features. McKinley uses

different literary texts to expound his views.

The time factor is deemed crucial in this book, so is the chronology of events. Amongst other things, Vrey's Chapter 5 focuses on the shifting approaches that have had a direct impact on military culture. In this regard, he identifies three generations. The first generation is premised on relativism, which leads to the understanding of how the other side views matters and reacts to them. The second generation is influenced by the Gramscian perspective which holds the view that "strategic elites dominate in order to continue their supremacy over the system" (p. 51). The third generation allows one to work more empirically when viewing cases; scholars who subscribe to this [third] generation tend to focus more on matters in order to enhance the extent to which strategic culture can be researched in a comprehensive manner (pp. 51-52). The sequence of events is linked to the different time periods.

As times change, expectations about how armed forces should behave also change thus complicating the concept of "military culture". Whilst for many years armed forces were expected to act in a particular way, albeit not exactly the same all the time, there is now a growing expectation across the globe that "the conduct of a nation's armed forces must be seen to reflect the values of broader society" (p. 67). Inferred in this observation is the view that unlike in the past when armed forces had characteristic features which distinguished them from larger society, the former can no longer operate outside of the society. In essence, armed forces are now expected to uphold the societal ethos and paraphernalia.

Chapters 6 to 8 focus on Australia, Kenya and Ethiopia. Each of these chapters identifies and describes the various dimensions of the "culture" of the national armies of the countries being discussed. While the Australian army is said to have conspicuous distinctive features such as: professionalism, community, hierarchy, and conservatism (p. 113), the author (Jans) argues that these features can be adapted and applied elsewhere outside Australia. In the Kenyan case, Katumanga explains the mutating insecurity challenges in Kenya by drawing a nexus between military culture and anomie (p. 129). He identifies three "spaces": gerontocracy which looks at militarised youth formations against older established order; ethnic spaces where traditional warriors engage under appropriate modern modes of extraction of resources such as cattle; and national spaces whereby the state is being constantly undermined by new emerging groups in society which challenge state power (p. 133). The author then looks at the chronology in the military culture

of Kenya from the colonial period to the reigns of Presidents Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi. The Ethiopian case presents 1991 as the watershed in the country's history and the history of Ethiopia's armed forces. Specific reference is made to the end of the 30-year civil war in Eritrea and the civil war in Ethiopia. The three sections of the chapter demonstrate how the Ethiopian military culture has evolved over time.

Chapters 9-13 focus on South Africa. The common denominator in these chapters is that the South African army has undergone a metamorphosis over the years. The sign-posts used in the chapters are: 1910 when the union was established bringing together the former four colonies; 1912 when the Union Defence Force (UDF) was established by the forces from the four colonies; 1948 when the South African Defence Force (SADF) was created; and 1994 which saw the establishment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). The authors present a retrospective account on South Africa's armed forces (van der Waag), analyse the transformation process undergone by the army after the 1994 election (Nathan) or focus on the contemporary outlook of the South African army (Esterhuyse & Heinecken). Vale asks why social theory matters in knowledge production (including the study of the military) and implores scholars to subscribe to the view that "ideas matter" (p. 199).

Two conclusions are drawn in this book: (i) military culture is closely linked to the task of armed forces; (ii) military culture needs to conform to the driving principle that the armed forces, at all times, have to serve society (p. 266). These conclusions re-state the book's focal point and assist the reader who may have missed the essence of the book in the introduction.

This book is undoubtedly a valuable source on the subject under investigation. It provides the theoretical undertones behind the broader theme and uses specific country case studies to elucidate the key arguments so that the theoretical statements can make sense even to the novice reader. Theory and practice are lucidly merged into one. But there are two glaring biases. The first one is "gender bias". Of the 14 Chapters, only one is written by a female (Lindy Heinecken). The second one is a "country bias". Five chapters focus specifically on South Africa. Invariably, even some of the chapters that do not have South Africa as their primary focus still make reference to this country. In a way, this is not surprising given that the book aimed at scrutinizing the institutional culture of the South African military.

Having said the above, *On Military Culture* is a great contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Its contents cut across disciplines, which include: history (military and political), political science, cultural studies and philosophy, to name just a few. Thus, the editors should be commended for a job well done. The eloquence, dexterity, scholarly approach but yet accessible writing style of this book makes it irrefutably qualify for a "thumbs up"!

Chatsworth: The making of a South African township
(UKZN Press,Scottsville 2013, 504 pp.ISBN:978-1-86914-255-1

Ashwin Desai *&* **Goolam Vahed**

Betty Govinden
Senior Research Associate
University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
herbyg@telkomsa.net

Reading *Chatsworth, the making of a South African township*, I find I inhabit several time zones at once.

I am transported to the time, five decades ago: The Nationalist Government was on an intractable and seemingly irreversible course of Separate Development. Bantu Education had been firmly secured as government policy earlier in 1952; the tribal colleges were being inaugurated all over the country, and soon some of us would be wending our way to Salisbury Island and other bush colleges; the "Homelands" were caught in the carnivalesque of independence; Passive Resistance and the Defiance Campaigns, that blossomed in the first half of the 20th Century, were wilting in the face of the intransigence of the apartheid regime. The Treason Trial and the Rivonia Trial landmarked the late 1950s and early 1960s, and Nelson Mandela would be sent to Robben Island for 27 years. [How ironic to re-live this history now, since we received the news of Mandela's death, and realize that Mandela personifies that "long duree" in our history, his tired body now in the deep