

## Book Reviews

Heike L. Schmidt (2013), *Colonialism and Violence in Zimbabwe: A History of Suffering*, Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, ISBN: 978-1-84701-051-3, 287 pp.

There has been considerable scholarship on the anti-colonial struggle in Zimbabwe and the liberation war of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. This body of literature comprises contributions by Terence Ranger, David Lan and Kenneth Manungo, among numerous other scholars, including the very controversial work of Norma Kriger.<sup>1</sup> While these scholarly contributions have provided some insights into the dynamics of the liberation struggle among different Zimbabwean communities, in my view Heike Schmidt's *Colonialism and Violence in Zimbabwe: A History of Suffering* is, so far, the best study of a Zimbabwean community's responses in the context of armed violence and in the face of adversity emanating from successive wars or conflicts, including the Second Chimurenga. Here is a study that is not only well researched and clearly presented but impressively grounded on a real sense of empathy with the community that arises out of a sensitive understanding and appreciation of their lived experiences and culture, based on the author having spent considerable time living in and interacting with the community as one of its members. It is evident from the book's highly nuanced treatment of the history of Honde Valley that Schmidt fully appreciates the complexities of the community's culture, belief systems and customs, along with the challenges of existing in a society that has to contend with the adversities and opportunities that come with living on the frontier. Speaking as a Zimbabwean, I have to say that the most striking aspects of this study are just how well the author has absorbed the world of her study's subjects and its intellectual, spiritual and cultural underpinnings and complexities and how effectively she conveys this deep understanding.

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1 Terence Ranger (1967), *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896–7: A Study in African Resistance*, London: Heinemann; Terence Ranger (1985), *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study*, London: James Currey; David Lan (1985), *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*, London: James Currey; Kenneth Manungo (1991), 'The Peasantry in Zimbabwe: A Vehicle for Change', in: Preben Kaarsholm (ed.), *Cultural Struggle and Development in Southern Africa*, Harare: Baobab Books, 115-124; Norma Kriger (1992), *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The study traces the history of suffering in this frontier borderland community in eastern Zimbabwe from the raids of the Madzviti of the Gaza-Nguni Empire of Soshangana in the early nineteenth century through the Makombe War of the immediate post-World War I years, the intrusion of both African and European modernisers – such as the adherents of the Ziwe Zano Movement and the whites in the form of the colonial state and the tea plantation entrepreneurs – and the invasion of displaced plateau Manyika groups who were forced into the area by racialised colonial land policies. Thereafter came the violence associated with “the boys” with guns, starting with FRELIMO guerrillas in the early 1960s, followed by ZANLA combatants and then by RENAMO in the 1980s.

Chapter 1 introduces the study and spells out the theoretical foundations of the subsequent historical account and analysis, while Chapter 2 introduces the Honde Valley as a frontier community and explores its role as a buffer “against intrusions from the east” in the form of military raiders from Gaza State. It also examines the arrival of colonisation and the establishment of the border between Portuguese and British territories, which further reinforced the Honde Valley’s position as a frontier area. The chapter argues that the community’s frontier status was a source of both “danger and opportunity” which shaped “local identity” and the subsequent history of the area. Chapter 3 traces and analyses the “landscape imaginations of the area on the part of Africans and European pioneers from the 1930s to the 1950s”, while Chapter 4 examines the early “guerilla–civilian interactions in the 1970s, against the backdrop of earlier rural grievances”. This and the next chapter, which focus respectively on guerilla–civilian relations between FRELIMO and ZANLA, are significant in the historiography of peasant roles in and peasants’ reactions to armed conflict in Zimbabwe, particularly with respect to the armed liberation struggle from the 1960s to the 1970s, about which scholars have tended to advance one-dimensional explanations of local communities’ responses and to present the local communities as either helpless victims of violence or heroic resisters to colonial oppression. These two chapters reveal the multidimensional character of the relationship between the armed liberation fighters and the local communities, demonstrating that “the different models of mobilisation as developed in the Zimbabwean historiography by Kriger, Lan and Ranger are not necessarily exclusive, nor even contradictory” and that there is a danger of oversimplification by resorting to meta-narratives of “political violence and insurgency” (23). Chapter 6 analyses the immediate independence years in which the frontier community was further subjected to brutal RENAMO violence which, ironically, led the Zimbabwean government to resort to the unpopular villagisation pro-

gramme that its own fighters had condemned during the anti-colonial struggle earlier. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion on social healing and reconciliation and emphasises the lessons to be learnt from “how Zimbabweans have made sense of their experience of violence” and developed their own appropriate ideologies and practices, which have enabled them to deal with communal suffering in ways that have led to social healing.

Among the many strengths of this book, therefore, is its shift in approach from the oppression-and-resistance template that has characterised much writing on the Zimbabwean colonial experience to a more complex and nuanced investigation of how local concerns and struggles intertwined with long-standing anti-colonial resentments over land, racial discrimination, colonial rule and other factors to shape the local community’s response to violence and physical threats. While clearly local grievances over land, displacement, state agricultural policies and racial discrimination are common to most communities in colonial Zimbabwe, the way in which these and other issues shape the Honde Valley community’s responses and attitudes can be fully grasped only through a deep understanding of the community itself and the bedrock foundation of its world view. In the case of the Second Chimurenga, the community’s support for or opposition to the liberation forces is not based simply on the latter’s capacity for violence and coercion (although this is obviously a factor in some situations) but is part of a complex array of factors which are deeply embedded in the history of Honde Valley as a frontier or borderland, with its long history of conflict and strife dating as far back as the nineteenth century, a history characterised by both opportunity and danger and where cross-border mobility has always been part of the region’s lived experience.

*Colonialism and Violence in Zimbabwe: A History of Suffering* is based on an impressive array of written sources, including documents from the National Archives of Zimbabwe, National Records Centre, Ministry of Agriculture and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe in Harare, and further records from the District Administrator’s Office in Mutasa District, the Department of Rural Development in Mutare (under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development), the Provincial Administrator’s Office in Mutare, the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford, England, and the Tanzania National Archives in Dar-es-Salaam, as well as private papers. Equally impressive is the long list of interviews that the author conducted with individuals in the Honde Valley, which undoubtedly contributed greatly to her intimate knowledge of the world of the people of this area. The book also makes

very good use of newspapers and a wide range of published secondary sources to provide a wholistic and sophisticated history of this very important and interesting section of Zimbabwe.

This is a major and welcome addition to Zimbabwean historiography and one that is a must-read for anyone who has an interest in the recent history of Zimbabwe in general but also in the particular history of Honde Valley and the armed violence that its people have endured since the nineteenth century.

■ Alois S. Mlambo