

events and accusations. In the 1980s and 1990s, violent episodes erupted in Green Valley, where perceived witches were either killed or expelled from local villages by 'comrades' (ANC youth) who presented themselves as guardians of community morality – effectively replacing the vacuum left by the subversion of chiefly authority through Betterment and Bantu Authorities.

The only shortcoming of Niehaus's insightful and mature work is the noticeable absence of comparative material, especially concerning witchcraft in neighbouring Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Niehaus does hint at the heterogeneity of the phenomenon in Green Valley, and that there are many 'different types' of witchcraft and spirit possession (p. 24), but does not fully investigate the crossover between elements of witchcraft and spirit possession derived from Mozambique and Zimbabwe, as partially expounded in a 2002 paper in *African Affairs*. He also states that 'new lines of contestation are likely to emerge as witchcraft becomes embroiled in the politics of African nationalism' (p. 184), but fails to investigate the wider significance of witchcraft beyond the borders of South Africa. This is unfortunate, especially given the significance that David Lan attached to witchcraft as a mechanism and tool of war in neighbouring Zimbabwe during the late 1970s.

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M. J. SPIERENBURG, *Strangers, Spirits and Land Reforms: conflicts about land in Dande, northern Zimbabwe*. Leiden: Brill (pb 978 9004139 57 2). 2004, 260 pp.

This book examines 'internal' land reforms in post-colonial Zimbabwe. These reforms encompass large-scale government initiatives – to reorganize and intensify land use, to resettle the land-hungry and to rationalize settlement – within communal lands. Faced by the resistance of white landowners to land redistribution, alongside demands for land by indigenous peoples, Zimbabwe sought, between 1985 and 1996, to divert demands for land redistribution, 'densifying' communal areas, while 'rationalizing' land use and controlling land degradation. International donors provided large-scale finance towards such reforms as the mid-Zambezi Land Use project, and NGOs supported the reforms to increase small farmer productivity and conserve nature *in situ*.

This book on Dande in northern Zimbabwe depicts the negative effects of the internal land reforms, including increased conflicts and landlessness. It also analyses the complex social structures and political economy of the region, and how local resistance to the reforms mobilized – largely via networks of local spirit mediums – by using narratives on land. The book also details how struggles within the Dande communities are mobilized to shape demands and resistance to the reforms. In particular, it examines conflicts over land between autochthons and migrants (or strangers), and between other groups, based on class, social status and gender, and discusses how these are mediated within wider struggles against government officials, and among various sections of the community.

It is argued that official narratives on land degradation, which underpinned the internal reforms, were challenged by the counter-narratives which justified resistance to land-use planning and the relocation of families by invoking ancestors to explain crises such as the severe drought – and by relating such crises to the abrogation of traditions of land regulation through government

controls. This narrative emphasizes land reforms based on redistributing land held by whites, as opposed to the internal reforms. This resistance, however, only managed to delay the implementation of the internal reforms, which failed to avert landlessness, tenure insecurity, low productivity and land degradation as promised. In the end, the shift of government policy towards a fast-track land redistribution programme in 2000 diverted the attention of the land-hungry towards invading former white-owned lands, just as project officials were redeployed to the new land redistribution programme. The broader effects of the counter-narrative, however, partly fuelled demands for land redistribution.

In essence therefore, the book implicitly argues for a deeper understanding of Zimbabwe's land question, and of the Fast Track Land Reform. It identifies a variety of social forces in rural areas that articulated demands for land redistribution, including the local chiefs, spirit mediums, autochthons in overcrowded communal areas and landless migrants (strangers). In reality these forces buttressed the search by urban elites and other politically organized interests for a radical official land redistribution programme at that conjuncture. The study is thus a critical reminder of the complex processes which have led to the stalling and revival of redistributive land reforms in Zimbabwe since 1980. It highlights the failure of palliative policies, such as internal land reforms and rural development, to accommodate local priorities and repress popular demands for land redistribution. The evidence pinpoints the critical role played by non-state actors, including the traditional leaders and spirit mediums mobilized by locals, in rejecting internal land reforms and orchestrating land redistribution.

The book also makes an important contribution to the study of spirit mediums in rural Zimbabwe by rejecting over-simplified renditions of their grand and self-contained influence on local communities and officialdom. It replaces this perspective with a nuanced treatment of their changing interactions with socially differentiated rural communities, which in turn influence the spirit mediums' narratives. Moreover, the spirit mediums were found to be willing to mediate the interests of 'strangers'. The evidence shows how spirit mediums and chiefs frequently pursued the demands of their adherents, and how the Mhondoro cult had become an important platform for debates on development and various social and political issues, as opposed to operating autonomously. Thus, spirit mediums cannot be situated narrowly within the traditions of autochthons, nor only within a vision of the past, given that they mediate the interests of various residents, do not reject 'modern development', and look towards the future.

The author provides critical insights into why local communities resist development projects, including internal land reforms, and in so doing provides important clues to understanding demands for redistributive land reforms in Zimbabwe.

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TANYA LYONS, *Guns and Guerrilla Girls: women in the Zimbabwean liberation struggle*. Trenton: Africa World Press (pb US\$29.95 – 1 592 21167 4). 2004, 338 pp.

The book is based on the author's PhD thesis and draws upon 12 months of fieldwork in Harare in 1996–7. Inspired by the field of subaltern and postcolonial studies, Lyons's aim is to write women back into Zimbabwean liberation war history, thereby 'reducing' their subaltern status and making them

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