

**Mustafah Dhada.** *The Portuguese Massacre of Wiriyamu in Colonial Mozambique, 1964-2013.* London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2015. 256 pp. \$116.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4725-1198-0.



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Beginning on the 16th of December 1972, Portuguese colonial troops, in conjunction with the DGS (Direcção-Geral de Segurança, or General Security Directorate, the secret police), massacred close to four hundred people from five villages in the Wiriyamu triangle, in the province of Tete. A massacre is by its nature an act of extreme brutality, but the gratuitous sadism displayed by DGS agents, as well as the colonial military's policy of herding men, women, and children into huts and then tossing in a grenade so as to conserve ammunition, surely would raise a horrified outcry from the wider world. Accordingly, the government of Portugal's Estado Novo (or New State) dictatorship (1926-74), Marcelo Caetano, devoted itself to a cover-up. Facts, including the very existence of the villages, were denied. Witnesses, including Catholic priests, were arrested and/or expelled while propaganda tours were given to bolster the regime's version of events. When it was no longer possible to deny the massacre completely, the regime downplayed its significance; maybe a few isolated killings happened, probably villagers

caught in a cross-fire between colonial soldiers and FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, or Liberation Front of Mozambique). Despite an outpouring of work concerning the massacre, ranging from journalistic to academic to film to novels, some continue to question the exact events that occurred in Wiriyamu. Readers of the journal *Civil Wars* may be aware of a controversy in 2012, where the Portuguese academics Bruno Reis and Pedro Oliveira cast doubts as to the nature, extent, and scale of the killings in Wiriyamu.[1]

Mustafah Dhada's book on the Wiriyamu massacre intervenes decisively in any lingering controversy. By combining a Vanisa-inspired approach to oral history, with archival sources, media accounts and even works of fiction, Dhada achieves an impressive feat of layered storytelling, leaving little doubt towards the extent of the atrocities that occurred. This account attempts to reconstruct the contested social field in which the massacre took place with almost forensic detail. In parts, this narrative resembles a Holly-

wood blockbuster, where a quick-thinking British journalist manages to steal back his confiscated film from an inattentive agent of the colonial secret police. The true strength of this book though, is its exploration of the interactions of a diverse set of actors, from local chiefs, Portuguese soldiers, members of the secret police, FRELIMO cadres, and Spanish priests that set the stage for the massacre and its eventual discovery in a place that the colonial state claimed did not even exist on a map, a claim reiterated by Reis and Oliveira in 2012 and convincing refuted by Dhada.

The book is clearly organized and meticulously lays out the evidence for the massacre in ten chapters. It begins with a foreword by Peter Pringle, the British journalist who broke the story internationally, followed by the author's introduction. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the sources of the book, primarily literature and oral research, while in the fourth chapter Dhada discusses the liberation struggle in Mozambique and how that affected Wiriyamu. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the changing role of the church in the Tete province and the various ways it reacted to mass violence, both officially and through the individual actions of parish priests. Chapters 7 and 8 discuss how the massacre came to the attention of the wider world and the Portuguese reaction to these revelations, whereas the last two chapters turn the social organization of Wiriyamu before the massacre and the events of the massacre itself. The conclusion discusses the wider ramifications of the massacre and the aftermath.

The book explores the social history of Wiriyamu and the events leading to the massacre, providing what is likely to be the definitive account, but two particular avenues of investigation stand out. The first is a detailed social history of Wiriyamu. Building from a wide variety of sources, including anthropologists like Harry West and Paolo Israel, who discuss the connections between politics, the spirit world, and sorcery in the northern province of Cabo Delgado,

Dhada reconstructs a complicated mosaic of local power, legitimacy, and authority. While the counternarrative of the Estado Novo (which was overthrown by a military coup in 1974), one revived by Reis and Oliveira, dismissed accounts of the massacre, the author describes an area that while remote, was at the center of the kinds of power struggles that convulsed the late colonial period. FRELIMO, whose armed struggle began in 1964, was attempting to consolidate itself in Tete by securing supply routes and recruiting villagers into its ranks, while the colonial state ramped up its counterinsurgency efforts. Chiefs had to engage in a delicate balancing act, as being perceived as too close to one side or the other could invite violent retribution. Dhada gives a gripping account of the ways in which local politics, personal interests, and economic interests help to set the stage for the events that occurred.

The second avenue of investigation is a discussion of the complicated relationship between the Catholic Church, the colonial regime, and the priests who were instrumental in bringing the massacre to the world's attention. A brand of conservative Catholicism was a central ideological pillar of the new state, whose leaders based their imperial legitimacy on claims of spreading Christian civilization to previously "savage" lands. In 1940 Salazar signed a concordat with Pope Pius XII concerning the operation of the church within the Portuguese empire. In return for allowing the church exclusive access to proselytize in the colonies, the new state assumed full control over education, allowing it to propagate state ideology, and was able to approve the church's nominations of candidates to fill available posts within the church hierarchy. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Morier-Genoud, Dhada describes the momentous transformations of the church in the late colonial period and how it went from an arm of the state to a vehicle of social change. Figures in the top levels of the church's hierarchy in Mozambique brought new attitudes and priorities, but central to the story in Tete is the role of

the Burgos fathers. A shortage of personnel meant the church in Mozambique had to recruit more widely. Under the rule of a more reform-minded bishop, many parishes in Wiriyamu were staffed by Spanish members of the Burgos fathers. These priests, often of working-class background themselves, many of whom had previously worked in poverty-stricken communities, developed strong relationships with their congregations and even tried to create working relationships with FRELIMO cadres in the area. Although few had any professed desire to overthrow the colonial regime, their outrage at abuses committed by the New State led some priests to expose the massacre at great personal risk. Dhada's account adds to the historiography of the Catholic Church during the liberation through an engaging narrative of the cat-and-mouse game between disaffected Burgos fathers, an often ambivalent church hierarchy, and an increasingly enraged state.

One can question the importance Dhada assigns to the massacre as a turning point in the war, although the atrocity surely played a major role in solidifying popular opposition to Portugal's attempts to maintain its imperial possessions among many key allies, such as the United Kingdom. Its legacy for those directly affected is far more ambivalent, as one man describes with despair that the victory of the liberation struggle only brought more war. Such a point is perhaps especially salient considering the events in Mozambique over the past few years. 2013 saw the resumption of sporadic violence between the ruling FRELIMO party and the RENAMO (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana) opposition and former rebels in the civil war, which lasted from 1977-92. Violence appears to have intensified after the 2014 presidential election, with ambushes, the assassination of local officials, and rumored summary executions and other abuses. Once again villagers in central Mozambique must position themselves between the demands of competing protagonists and conflicting loyalties. Perhaps the greatest difference between the events de-

scribed by Dhada and the current violence is that this time it seems neither side can credibly offer a better future. While the future in Mozambique is uncertain, Dhada's compelling and, sadly, timely book offers a multifaceted account of the ways in which acts of brutality can change the course of events. In my opinion it will be of great interest to students of colonialism, liberation struggles, social history, and the history of religion in Africa and I strongly recommend it.

#### Note

[1]. Bruno C. Reis and Pedro A. Oliveira, "Cutting Heads or Winning Hearts: Late Colonial Portuguese Counterinsurgency and the Wiriyamu Massacre of 1972," *Civil Wars* 14, no. 1 (2012): 80-103.

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