

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Allan, Joanna (2021) Violence and gender in Africa's Iberian colonies: feminizing the Portuguese and Spanish empire, 1950s–1970s. *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 22 (1). pp. 135-137. ISSN 1463-6204

Published by: Taylor & Francis

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14636204.2020.1841368>
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/14636204.2020.1841368>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/45676/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

Violence and gender in Africa's Iberian colonies: feminizing the Portuguese and Spanish empire, 1950s–1970s, by Andreas Stucki, Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 362 pp., €83.19 (hardback), ISBN978-3030172299 / €67.40 (e-book), ISBN 978-3-030-17230-5.

Andreas Stucki's book *Violence and Gender in Africa's Iberian Colonies* is a valuable and innovative addition to an established corpus of scholarship on the gendered nature of colonialism, as well as to the small but rapidly expanding historiography on the Iberian colonies in Africa. With accessible and lively prose, as well as striking details about the lives of individual women affected by colonization, the book is immensely readable.

2019 saw the publication of a trilogy of monographs that explore gender in late Iberian colonialism in Africa to various extents: my own *Silenced Resistance: Women, Dictatorship, and Genderwashing in Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea* and Enrique Bengochea's wonderful book *La sección femenina en la provincia de Sahara: Entrega, hogar e imperio* accompany Stucki's work on the bookshelf. All three overlap in their call to rethink Spanish decolonization from a gendered perspective, and in their use of the archives of the Spanish Falange's Sección Femenina as a principle source. To Stucki's great credit, he manages the unique and admirable feat of comparing and drawing insights from no fewer than four colonial cases. Focusing on colonial women's organizations that operated in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique and Spanish Sahara, Stucki illustrates that there was a "feminine turn" in the Iberian empires during the 1960s and 1970s (14). In the book's opening, he convincingly argues that this feminine turn constituted a final rearguard of empire in a world that was rapidly becoming postimperial. The colonial

powers hoped that women's organizations would help create favourable conditions in Africa for the Spanish and Portuguese states after independence.

Stucki's second chapter looks at the overall aims (including in the metropolises) of the Sección Femenina of the Spanish Falange (SF) and the female branch of the Portuguese Youth (MPF). It explains how the two Far Right organizations came to work in the African colonies and with what ostensible objectives. The Iberian women's organizations were imperial agents, Stucki argues, with generalizable mindsets when it came to their views of indigenous women. Gayatri Spivak's well-known idea of colonialism – in the colonists' eyes – as white men saving brown women from brown men plays out in a nuanced fashion in Africa's Iberian colonies, where the self-proclaimed saviours were white women. SF and MPF wished to “free virtually enslaved women and raise them up” (33).

Particularly useful for researchers is Stucki's evaluation of the state of the archives and what implications this has for his own work and potentially for other historians. For example, Stucki notes that MPF reports “followed strict structural conventions and were for the most part ostensibly ‘race blind’ (as a result of legislative requirements implemented in the empire in 1961)” (44). As a result, looking for evidence of indigenous women's resistance to the MPF, Stucki admits the difficulties of reading the Portuguese archival sources against the grain as compared to the surviving Spanish SF sources. Stucki notes also that the MPF burned much of its own colonial archive on the occasion of the 1974 revolution in Portugal and that several sections of the Spanish colonial archives remain closed to the public.

Chapter 3 examines how MPF and SF programmes overlapped with, and furthered, repressive military and administrative measures. It illustrates how both the Portuguese and Spanish colonizers drew inspiration from the US and elsewhere in

Europe when it came to psychological warfare and counterrevolution. Stucki charts the “scorched earth” policies employed in all his case studies and how these campaigns of environmental destruction went hand in hand with Iberian policies to force indigenous populations into purpose-built settlements. The latter could be, and were, promoted locally, nationally and internationally as measures to bring “modernity” and “development” to the natives. This is perhaps where SF and MPF actions complemented colonial war efforts most closely. The domesticity skills that the two organizations promoted would ensure that new houses would be looked after properly, and their efforts to “uplift” native women furthered the myth of Iberia’s “generous” and “fraternal” intentions towards the colonized.

Chapter 4 serves to undo this story. Here, Stucki explores the Lusotropical and Hispanotropical legends of harmonious race relations and exposes the daily realities of white cultural supremacy that resulted in various constellations of discrimination and exploitation for indigenous women. This resulted in contradictory pictures in both the Spanish and Portuguese empires. Whilst any incident that contradicted the perfect pictures of multiracialism and cultural integration was to be avoided on the public stage, internal reports – Stucki points out – often acknowledged the inconsistencies and problems.

At the opening of chapter 5, Stucki asks

Did all the African soldiers in the service of the colonial state, all the different intermediaries, nurses, clerks, and teachers who contributed to maintaining empires betray the “national cause” and should they therefore be labeled traitors and collaborators of the empire? (170)

He does not offer an outright answer to this question, but rather poses further linked questions and gives evidence that complicates the possible responses. Focusing on the Saharawis, he points out that existing hierarchies were reproduced in the demographics of SF attendees. Saharawi notables' daughters were well represented in classes. At the same time though, SF pupils were later at the forefront of the pro-independence protests. With the example of Ndowe people in Equatorial Guinea, Stucki shows that SF "principles merged well with 'traditional' gender roles" (178). The Ndowe population of Equatorial Guinea is tiny compared to the slightly larger Bubi population and the dominating Fang population (around 80 percent of Equatoguinean citizens are Fang). The book does not explore the extent to which reactions to the SF differed between ethnic groups with very different gendered cultural practices, or how the SF fostered tensions between different ethnic communities and to what end. The aforementioned gaps in the colonial archives, or perhaps a determined lack of attention to ethnicity on the part of SF report writers, would perhaps make such an exploration very difficult.

Chapter 6 analyzes two types of colonial competitions: housewife and beauty contests. It also focuses on the various other tools the colonial powers had at their disposal for furthering their domestic agendas, including boarding schools for native women and girls and trips to the metropole. Why such a focus on the domestic? Explains Stucki, "[p]urportedly banal or harmless activities such as ironing, cooking, or dancing were part and parcel of the cultural struggle to stabilize African households and, in the end, the empire" (218). Domestic activities were seen to have a civilizing influence on indigenous women.

Chapter 7 shines a light on indigenous women's role in revolutionary projects, and on the role envisaged for women in postindependence societies. Stucki argues

that women's foreseen roles "were, ironically, very similar to the imperial powers' blueprints" (257). Although this assertion is debatable in the Saharawi case, Stucki's point is most convincing in relation to the importance, for the pro-independence movements, of projecting an image of gender equality to Western powers. Here the motivations of said movements overlapped, argues Stucki, with the colonizers' attempts to uplift native women in their bid to display themselves as agents of modernity and development.

A powerful epilogue closes the book, highlighting the recent implications of colonial Spain and Portugal's Lusotropical and Hispanotropical false claims of benevolent colonialism and cultural integration. Overall, this is a remarkable, original and ambitious study of gendered Iberian colonialism, which will be indispensable not only to scholars of African history, but also to scholars working in Hispanic studies, Lusophone studies, women and gender studies and a number of allied fields.

Joanna Allan

Northumbria University

joanna.allan@northumbria.ac.uk

© 2020, Joanna Allan