SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RESPONSES TO COLONIALISM  
ON THE MARGINS: COMMUNITY, CHIEFTAINCY AND  
ETHNICITY IN BULILIMA-MANGWE, ZIMBABWE, 1890–1930

Enocent Msindo

Introduction

With a few exceptions, scholarship on African responses to colonialism in colonial Zimbabwe have largely been confined to initial primary resistance evident in the 1893 and 1896–1897 wars against the British South African Company (hereafter BSAC) which established its authority in Mashonaland in 1890. Most attention has been paid to the bloody 1896–1897 fights between the Company and Africans, both Shona and Ndebele. Terence Ranger’s attempts in The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia (1970) to study African voices further remained stuck in the nationalist historiography which viewed most Africans movements of the time as epitomising African nationalist consciousness. Nationalist historians also erred in representing most African societies as compact wholes (for instance, Matabeleland as Ndebeleland). Consequently, this scholarship ignored the histories of small communities and especially their internal socio-political cultures, notably chieftaincy and ethnicity.

This chapter focuses on the Kalanga people who inhabit the southwestern part of Zimbabwe—a people whose communities cover the greater parts of the Botswana-Zimbabwe borderlands. By studying Kalanga communities closer to the margins of the state, I demonstrate that claims to Kalanga chieftaincy and the creation of Kalanga ethnicity were important factors in explaining Kalanga responses to colonial rule during the period up to the early 1930s. I argue that such claims were not entirely the making of the state, which in any case sought to repudiate them in favour of Ndebele identity and chieftaincies. Second, I argue that chieftaincy politics and the revival of Kalanga ethnic consciousness, themselves two connected issues, were not top-down processes, constructed and/or reinforced by the state, but that they were developments indigenous to the African communities which
Map of Bulima-Mangwe, Southern Rhodesia, showing approximate location of communities before 1939.