

Review Essay / Note Bibliographique

The Political Economy of Post-2000 Zimbabwe: An Engagement with Recent Zimbabwean Scholarship

Lloyd Sachikonye, 2012, *Zimbabwe's Lost Decade: Politics, Development & Society*, Harare, Zimbabwe, Weaver Press.

Brian Raftopoulos (Ed.), 2013, *The Hard Road to Reform: The Politics of Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement*, Harare, Zimbabwe, Weaver Press.

Prosper Matondi, 2012, *Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform*, Uppsala, Sweden, Nordic Africa Institute and London, U.K., Zed Books.

As Zimbabweans assess cloudy future prospects given the most recent unexpected electoral result with Robert Mugabe and his ZANU (PF) party so soundly trouncing Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC in the July 31, 2013 presidential and parliamentary elections that reportedly many on the victorious side were surprised by the breadth of victory amidst widespread allegations of electoral irregularities, this is an opportune time to discuss three recent publications assessing key political and economic features of the country by some of Zimbabwe's leading scholars. Lloyd Sachikonye's *Zimbabwe's Lost Decade: Politics, Development & Society*, Brian Raftopoulos's edited volume *The Hard Road to Reform: The Politics of Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement*, and Prosper Matondi's *Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform*, all provide great insight into understanding recent events and conditions in this southern African country. They also help suggest what should be done to potentially help address some of the many political and economic challenges facing Zimbabwe.

Lloyd Sachikonye's most recent book seeks to answer the question, how to explain Zimbabwe's deep plummet in its national economy and the increasing authoritarian state in its third decade, compared to other neighbouring countries which have better

managed their economy or their state? His detailed answer is a thorough political economic critique of the various pathways the Zimbabwean government has taken since Independence in 1980.

The first part of *Zimbabwe's Lost Decade* examines various features of politics in the postcolonial era. In the first chapter, Sachikonye unpacks the role of settler colonialism on the form and content of the African nationalist movement in this former British colony. Acknowledging the negative impact the rigidly racist governance and the violence used by the Rhodesian Front government of Ian Smith to try to oppress African nationalists, Sachikonye concentrates here on the restrictions imposed by African nationalists on diversity and debate, leading to a stifling of democracy. The emphasis among African nationalists in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe has been on authoritarianism and the repression of diversity, including other nationalist tendencies promoted by trade unionists and other African leaders. This tendency was exacerbated by the liberation struggle of the 1960s and 1970s, whereby all parties deployed violence as an instrument of mobilization. The rest of the chapter usefully examines the limitations of the various projects of national unity promoted by the postcolonial ZANU (PF) governments that have ruled Zimbabwe uninterrupted until 2008, as each ultimately depended on seeking to silence or absorb other political voices, contingent on particular economic conditions and wider political contexts shaping the actions of the ruling regime.

The remaining chapters in this first part provide more details on the political forms that have become dominant in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The next chapter carefully analyses the postcolonial state and its institutions, showing how ZANU (PF) deployed the inherited well-developed colonial infrastructure, including the security services. This chapter provides a good overview of the various branches of the state and how over the last three decades of ZANU (PF) rule the ruling party often treats itself as “a superior institution in governance vis-à-vis the cabinet, parliament and the public service” (p. 35).

The following chapter sketches out features of the main political parties in Zimbabwe, while noting that there is a dearth of detailed studies of political parties on the whole, or as individual entities, in Zimbabwe. The brief discussion of different features of the political parties, particularly ZANU (PF) and MDC, was helpful, but what I found more interesting was the details on inter-party and

intra-party conflicts from 2000 to 2008. Although Sachikonye is at pains to note that intra-party violence within the MDC was never as rampant as the violence the ZANU (PF) party and state subjected them, nonetheless the lack of accountability and the presence of violence within the party are indicative of the wider “culture of violence” in Zimbabwean politics and ultimately led to the split of the MDC into two formations.

The final chapter in the first part of the book gives good insight into the constitutional reform movement in Zimbabwe, which was a key and momentous development in the 1990s as part of the wider struggle for greater democracy in the country. Sachikonye shows how constitutionalism largely replaced socialism as the focus of political debates and how the movement for constitutional reform was largely stymied by an increasingly polarized political arena.

Most chapters in the second part of *Zimbabwe's Lost Decade* provide substantive insight into socioeconomic aspects of Zimbabwe and how they contributed to, and were shaped by, the wider crises in the country that began in the 2000s. The first chapter in this half of the book examines the relatively poor economic development in the first two decades of Independence and the catastrophic economic conditions of the third decade. Although Sachikonye is very critical of many of the policy choices made by the ZANU (PF) government, he also lays blame on many international economic advisors and others who put pressure on the government to liberalize, despite the generally adverse economic costs of these policies for the majority of Zimbabweans. Linking these failed plans to the growing legitimacy crisis of the ZANU (PF) government in the late 1990s, Sachikonye examines the growing political protests from a range of actors which led to both the emergence of the MDC and ultimately the transition to what he calls an authoritarian predatory state from 2000 to 2008. His examination of the economic features of this period – from the reliance on quasi-fiscal activities of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe to the proliferation of informalized economic activities – is particularly insightful.

His chapter on land reform provides great detail into this domain which has been a key arena for the politics of Zimbabwe. Although not as thorough as books devoted to the topic (see below), Sachikonye does an admirable job in showing both the broad features of the debate over land redistribution as well as the details of key events on the international and national stages which saw the forcible

take-over of most commercial farms owned by white Zimbabweans and their redistribution to black Zimbabweans. Moreover, he shows the overall decline of agricultural production due to the chaotic and at times violent processes of land redistribution and the adverse ramifications on the wider economy, and on food security.

His chapter on livelihoods and migration is very apt, demonstrating some of the economic consequences of the deepening poverty and inequalities connected to the political crises, including the massive emigration of up to three million Zimbabweans for economic and political reasons since 2000. Although there was an expansion of middle class livelihoods for many African Zimbabweans in the 1980s and 1990s, inequalities expanded as in other former white settler states. Inequalities widened even more while the middle class was gutted during the post-2000 crisis, made worse by a massive decline in the health and education sectors which were admirably built up in the first two decades of Independence. Such devastation to the economy and wider social services, let alone political persecution of MDC members, or those presumed to be, during periods of electoral contestation, all contributed to the decision for many Zimbabweans to emigrate to neighbouring countries or further afield. These displaced Zimbabweans, Sachikonye shows, through their remittances, were often important contributors to the livelihoods of relatives and others remaining in the country. In addition to these economic consequences, Sachikonye astutely also examines some of the cultural shifts emerging from these processes of displacement – from increasing pressures on the family, growth in importance of religion, and the aim of the ZANU (PF) political elite to cultivate through media and political practices an emphasis on traditional authority and patriarchy, let alone developing a “personality cult” around President Mugabe.

There are two chapters in this last part which to me would be more appropriately located in the first part of the book as they more explicitly look at elements of the state and politics of the country. The first of these chapters examines the altering balance between state and “civil society,” from an emphasis on partnership in the 1980s to growing antagonism in the 1990s to active repression of the latter by the former after 2000. In this chapter, Sachikonye analyses the different types of organizations that have emerged and their strategies vis-à-vis the state and, in turn, the often antagonistic tactics of the state towards them.

While this chapter focuses on internal relationships between the state and Zimbabwean organizations, the other chapter in this latter part with a focus on the state studies Zimbabwe's foreign relations, particularly within southern Africa, the wider continent, the West and with China. This is a particularly relevant chapter as it looks at how different governments and international bodies sought to engage with Zimbabwe, including seeking to mediate the growing political disputes, post-2000. Such efforts were often hampered by the limitations of the interveners, especially in light of the Zimbabwean government's emphasis on national sovereignty and territorial integrity as the main guides for its foreign policy; a stance, which Sachikonye suggests, increasingly exhibited "signs of paranoia and introspection rather than project confidence and dynamism" (p. 200).

Overall, *Zimbabwe's Lost Decade* is a thorough and helpful critical analysis of the political economy of Zimbabwe, particularly from the 1990s to 2008. While his narrative provides a grim portrait of the country and his own desire is for the emergence of a "development-oriented state", which is unlikely in the short-term at least, I find it to be a compelling argument. Sachikonye occasionally touches on some of the momentous events since the parliamentary and presidential elections in March 2008, but more in passing rather than in detail. However, Brian Raftopoulos's edited volume, *The Hard Road to Reform*, more than compensates for this lack of detail.

Brian Raftopoulos is another leading Zimbabwean scholar, one who has contributed much to both scholarly analysis and public debate in Zimbabwe. His current position as Director of Research and Advocacy for the Solidarity Peace Trust enables him to effectively carry out both roles. His edited volume brings together chapters by him and a number of both well-known and emerging Zimbabwean scholars and analysts and offers an invaluable analysis of the various compromises and activities of the Global Political Agreement (GPA).

The GPA was signed between ZANU (PF) and the two MDC parties (the one led by Morgan Tsvangirai and another smaller one after the party fractured) in September 2008 and implemented in February 2009. The GPA provided the blue-print for a "unity government" and aimed to provide economic stability and to ensure political peace prevailed in the country. This took place after great pressure from regional governments on ZANU (PF) given the

dramatic increase in political violence after the results of the March 2008 elections gave the MDC parties the majority in Parliament and had Tsvangirai leading Mugabe in the first round of the presidential poll. The unleashing of terror by ZANU (PF) and many of the state security branches before the second round of the poll held in late June 2008 ultimately led to Tsvangirai's withdrawal from the race and set in motion the events that led to the GPA itself. The thorough analysis of various aspects of this GPA contained in *The Hard Road to Reform* sheds much light on the recently conducted 2013 elections.

Raftopoulos himself provides a masterful analysis of the politics of the GPA. With great erudition, he untangles many of the complex relationships and interactions between national, regional and international processes and pressures while, at the same time, shedding light on some of the decisions made, and choices available to the GPA itself, during this period. Appropriately, he pays special attention to the approaches of the South African government before and after the GPA, including the important role it played in creating the agreement in the first place. He provides great insight into some of the decisions made by the Thabo Mbeki presidency, on how its emphasis was on the defence of national sovereignty and stability in Zimbabwe, marked by a real wariness of a "regime change" agenda of Western powers, and how it minimized any concern about political violence and human rights. Indeed, Raftopoulos shows how the contrast between rights and sovereignty, particularly the use of state power for massive land redistribution, is one which ZANU (PF) has effectively deployed consistently and moreover this imbalance between the two themes is uncomfortably found in the language of the GPA itself.

Raftopoulos details many of the events, moves and counter-moves leading up to the March 2008 elections and the ultimate formation of the GPA. This background is helpful in situating the actual politics of the GPA. I found his analysis to be particularly compelling when it examines some of the internal dynamics within the various political parties and how these shaped the functioning, or lack thereof, of various elements of the GPA. Overall, his assessment of the GPA was grim, given the imbalance between ZANU (PF) and the MDC formations, the limited steps it has taken towards fulfilling elements of the agreement, and the divisions between the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Western powers over the agreement itself. The following chapters in the book

substantively deepen this pessimism.

James Muzondidya focuses on the politics and the maneuvering of the two MDC parties under the GPA. Usefully noting that the GPA was not meant to lead to a “coalition government,” Muzondidya shows different perspectives on the agreement. International mediators saw it as a means to establish peace and stability before the next electoral contest. In turn, ZANU (PF) used it as a way to regroup after its shocking defeat at the polls and to seek to reconsolidate its grip over the state and the two MDC parties saw it as a means of gaining experience in governance and to try to open up democratic space for deliberations and for the conduct of elections without fear of political violence.

Muzondidya examines how the MDC formations were limited in many of the options they pursued in the GPA while, ironically, the agreement itself provided stability for ZANU (PF) to rebuild and, moreover, help the various businesses owned by their leaders to expand, generating finances to help rebuild the former ruling party. The revitalized ZANU (PF) was able to often block various initiatives of the MDC formations, given its retention of key ministries in the unity government and its long control over the economy and the state. For example, he provides great insight into how ZANU (PF) enabled its supporters to muscle into various economic opportunities and to thwart MDC officials and supporters, thus leading to both resentment and frustration for the MDC parties and the sense that patronage and opportunities lay with ZANU (PF). He also shows how Mugabe, who retained presidential powers, was often able to side-step Prime Minister Tsvangirai to block MDC initiatives and to further entrench ZANU (PF) in key areas, such as in the institutions that plan and govern elections.

Furthermore, Muzondidya critically analyses the performance of the MDC, demonstrating its weaknesses and often poor decisions. The MDC parties themselves, he shows, often spent much energy on intraparty and interparty disputes, leading to a progressive decline in their organizational strength. He also lays out some of the key axes of dispute and dissension with the MDCs. Reading this chapter, in particular, is helpful in providing insight into how the MDCs were unprepared for the July 2013 elections. As many commentators have noted since then, ZANU (PF)’s strategy helped to consolidate its base while those of the two MDC formations left them somewhat unconnected to parts of their own base.

Gerald Mazarire's chapter on ZANU (PF) is particularly illuminating, as he provides good insight into a surprisingly under-discussed topic. He situates their performance in the GPA within a wider analysis of its structures and history as a political party in the anti-colonial struggle and as ruling Zimbabwe. He provides insights into the outlooks shaping some of the former ruling party's attitude toward the GPA while showing how key security personnel became leading organizers in its commissariat department is a continuation of a long-held practice of security personnel being absorbed into leading positions of the former liberation organization. He also discusses the fractious but useful relationship between ZANU (PF) and the main war veterans' organization. What is especially interesting in the chapter is his careful analysis of how ZANU (PF) maintained itself in the strongest position in the "government of national unity" (GNU) formed out of the GPA; which was quite a feat, as Mazarire succinctly puts it, "to lose an election and stay in power" (p. 88). He shows how ZANU (PF) monopolized the key arms of government, while appointing all permanent secretaries, including those in the ministries run by the MDC formations as a way to contain their effectiveness. At the same time, ZANU (PF) deployed a range of tactics to harass and destabilize its opponents. Finally, Mazarire also provides a sound analysis of ZANU (PF)'s range of investments and ties to rich businessmen in Zimbabwe and beyond.

The contentious social terrain of Zimbabwean civil society organizations during this period is ably analysed by Bertha Chiroro. She sketches a history of this sector since independence, examining the shifts for many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches, and the trade union movement over the years as they became more focused on human rights, economic rights, and good governance which led the ZANU (PF) government to view most as hostile organizations, particularly after 2000. Although the MDC had many allies amongst these organizations, especially the trade union movement from which many of its leaders emerged, these relationships became frayed under the GPA as civil society activists were critical of what they saw as unnecessary compromises by the former opposition party in order to share power with ZANU (PF), even if it is from a disadvantaged position.

Chiroro raises questions about some of the stances taken by these organizations during this period, their lack of coordination, and

their overall general lack of effectiveness. The latter is due in part to the continued harassment many of the leaders and the organizations have faced at the hands of ZANU(PF)-aligned security forces. She concludes by suggesting that many of these organizations are trying to figure out their positions during this time of ambivalence and uncertainty of the GNU, which, one could extrapolate, suggests that many have lost legitimacy in the eyes of the various audiences they serve, including any members they may have, the wider Zimbabwean public, the GNU itself, and donors.

The next two chapters focus more specifically on Zimbabwe's international relations. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni examines the roles of SADC and the African Union in the GPA. He examines what he suggestively calls the "politics behind politics," the negotiations and conflicts that occurred in the back-rooms and along the corridors. Such politics, he strongly emphasizes, are informed and influenced by the complex histories of the region, including relationships with the West. He provides some subtle analyses of various events, the political symbolism involving the invocation of liberation struggles, and the various stances taken by ZANU (PF) and the two MDC parties during negotiations. Given the wariness of many African leaders towards Western countries and their trumpeting of human rights and the doctrine of the "right to protect," ZANU (PF) leaders often effectively portrayed Tsvangirai and his MDC as being closely aligned with the West and being against "African solutions for African problems." This helps to explain the surprising lack of sanctions placed on Mugabe by the African Union after the June 2008 "sham" run-off elections for president, which ultimately led to the GPA. As noted above, this not only gave ZANU (PF) a lifeline but a platform to keep its grip on many levers of power. Ndlovu-Gatsheni provides more substantive insight into the changing SADC mediation, particularly the impact of the switch from President Mbeki to President Zuma. He credits President Mbeki for setting the groundwork for the successful March 2008 election and for powerful mediation which led to the GPA itself. President Zuma has at times taken a bit more of a critical stance towards ZANU (PF), including chastising it in 2011 for its refusal to work with the MDC parties to implement 24 out of 27 areas which had been agreed to in the GPA. Yet, at the same time, Ndlovu-Gatsheni also observes that events in South Africa and internal divisions and disputes within the African National Congress ultimately means there has been less attention on

Zimbabwe by South Africa, the SADC-sanctioned mediator, than many Zimbabweans would have liked to see.

Munyaradzi Nyakudya examines Zimbabwe's relations with "the West" during the GPA, with a particular focus on the contentious issue of "sanctions." Although I find his assumptions that the "Western world" is united by a "common race, culture and civilisation of European origin" (p. 173) to be deeply problematic – "the West" is a social construction historically built on racialized notions and one should not assume such notions are built on some racial "fact" – he does provide good insight into the dominant forms of thinking within ZANU (PF) about "the West," of which "sanctions" has become a current flashpoint. To do so, he traces the history of stances taken by different European governments during the liberation struggle and the racial politics in Zimbabwe in the 1980s. The bulk of the analysis focuses on the different European, North American and Australian sanctions imposed on the ZANU (PF) government and individuals linked with them after 2000 and how their continued renewal, even after the formation of the GNU, gave ZANU (PF) an excuse to balk at implementing any of the other reforms it agreed to in the GPA. He also notes the double-standards, as different European powers sought a way to bypass sanctions in order to be involved in the trade of the diamonds, publicly discovered in the 2000s in the controversial Marange fields, despite human rights organizations widely documenting abuses by the ZANU (PF) government in exercising control over them. He also observes the ambivalence of MDC leaders over the issue of sanctions, providing more ammunition for President Mugabe as he seeks to portray the MDC as "puppets of The West" when talking to other African governments.

Both chapters on international relations add important contextual elements to the book, though it would have also been helpful to have a chapter focusing on the important role of China in and during the GPA, particularly in light of allegations of the Chinese government providing great support to ZANU (PF) during the 2013 elections.

The book concludes with a very thoughtful and important chapter by Shari Eppel, also of the Solidary Peace Trust, that examines the possibilities for transitional justice initiatives under the GPA. Although the GPA included the formation of the Organ of National Health, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI), Eppel realistically

observes that given the fragility of the GNU and the composition of the organ itself, it was unlikely to do much in this transitional period. Her quick tracing of the limitations of ONHRI are of interest, but the real strength of this chapter is to carefully lay out key global debates concerning ways of going about healing, reconciliation and transitional justice in the context of Zimbabwe. Such a chapter is vital as there are layers of trauma in the country – from the colonial repression, the liberation struggle, the Gukurahundi massacres by state forces in southern and western Zimbabwe in the 1980s, to the politicized violence from 2000 onwards – which should be addressed in a thoughtful manner, particularly as they are often mobilized for partisan political projects. She acknowledges the current political climate is not conducive to enable such initiatives – not during the GNU and definitely not since the 2013 elections as there are too many leaders of ZANU (PF) who could be publicly exposed for their roles in acts of violence (though she also notes there are some in the MDCs who would also be implicated). Moreover, actual transitional justice initiatives are never straightforward and require much planning and time and should emerge out of dialogue with affected communities, as she briefly shows in a few rich examples. As Eppel provocatively suggests, “we need to shift away from the simple HR [human rights] approach that has predominated in our accounts, with its categories and simple tables of ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’ and deal with our historical accounts in a more nuanced way” (pp. 234-235).

Analytical nuance is definitely needed when discussing land redistribution in Zimbabwe. Unlike those analysts found in many newspaper accounts which simply denounce the massive and highly politicized land redistribution exercise that has taken place since 2000 or those that blindly celebrate it as some unproblematic victory for African smallholder farmers like the recent book by Joseph Hanlon, Jeannette Manjengwa and Teresa Smart, *Zimbabwe Takes Back Its Land* (2012, Kumarian Press), Prosper Matondi’s *Zimbabwe’s Fast Track Land Reform* provides excellent scholarship on the complicated land resettlement processes and their varied socioeconomic consequences. As head of the Zimbabwean research unit, Ruzivo Trust, Matondi and his colleagues carried out empirical research in three different farming areas of Zimbabwe several times since 2000. The data and his analysis provide a much more complicated – more nuanced, if you will – portrait of the land resettlement practices in Zimbabwe since 2000, which also

undergird a number of important policy suggestions. Moreover, Matondi provides insight into the actions and thoughts of various Zimbabweans involved in the process, including some of the government agricultural bureaucrats who were sidelined during the politicized process.

The main focus of the book is on what has happened to the agrarian social landscapes given the massive replacement of predominantly white commercial farmers with black small-scale and medium-scale farmers? Between 2000 and 2009, the Zimbabwean government forcibly acquired 10.8 million hectares out of a total 12.3 million hectares of commercial farm land. The impetus for this massive land redistribution was a combination of attempts by ZANU (PF) to stave off the growing support for the MDC before the June 2000 parliamentary election through supporting occupations of white-owned commercial farms led by veterans of the guerrilla armies of the 1970s (known colloquially as “war vets”) and using them to force fealty to the ruling party and historic and deep-seated demands by many black Zimbabweans to redress the inequalities inherited from colonial era policies which reserved the best agricultural land for the white minority and shoe-horned (in Ian Phimister’s felicitous phrase) most black Africans into the often poor lands of native reserves. These often violent land occupations then bled into what the ZANU (PF) government called the Fast Track Land reform Programme (FTLRP). Matondi provides rich detail on the minutia of these processes and the wider politics shaping them.

Most of the nearly 5,000 or so white commercial farmers on this land were removed and replaced by what the government called “A1” smallholder farmers, who were to have plots between 12 and 30 hectares and are said to follow tenure and farming arrangements commonly found in the Communal Areas (the postcolonial name for the former colonial native reserves), and more commercially-oriented “A2” farms which were larger and are given leasehold tenure. By 2011, there were 145,775 A1 farmers on 5.8 million hectares and 16,386 A2 farmers on 2.9 million hectares of land. The upheaval and transformation have been immense and the debates have been fierce. Matondi’s book does not provide the final word on it, but it does provide great grounded insight into these processes and offers suggestions of what could be done to improve the socioeconomic consequences.

Matondi provides incredibly detailed analysis of a whole range of aspects of the FTLRP. I will just highlight a few of the many arguments he makes. Unlike the critics of the process, Matondi is at pains to point out that even though an elite tied to ZANU (PF) gained from the haphazard processes of land distribution, at the same time many poor Zimbabweans also have benefitted in terms of gaining access to land and the redistribution should not be reversed.

One of his key arguments is the insecurities for the new farmers generated through the lack of tenure hampers productivity gains. He shows how the haphazard and politicized FTLRP has led to many extra-legal bodies to influence access to land and the security of tenure, which has undermined state institutions: “the state and its local protégés (War Veterans, the then ruling party authorities and technical bureaucrats) have retained control over what happens on the FTFs [fast Track Farms].... This means that the ability of government officials to provide technically sound advice, extension services and the regulation of land rights was curtailed, and there was nowhere to turn to for recourse, as the top levels of leadership in government, who were also politicians, undermined their officials’ effectiveness” (p. 98). Such insecurity, Matondi argues, helped to undermine food production, employment creation and foreign currency generation. In light of this insecurity, he shows various strategies taken by smallholders to adjust to and try to minimize the risk, such as hanging onto any land they may have had in the Communal Areas, to investing in infrastructure in their new A1 farm as a way to dissuade the government from possibly taking it away from them. Even though the government and media seeks to reassure the new settlers that they are secure in their landholdings, given that occasionally individuals well-connected to the political elite were able to evict farmers as well as the ongoing lawsuits many former white commercial farmers have pursued continue to create a climate of uncertainty.

Matondi also addresses the important issues of productivity and women’s access to land. For the former, he analyses the range of factors that have contributed to a great reduction in production on the land, from the lack of commercial lending to a steep decline in agricultural infrastructure after the forcible evictions, from an extremely adverse macroeconomic climate to poorly implemented government agricultural plans. The inability to implement policy goals is also apparent in terms of women’s access to land. Although

the government declared that women would be prioritized in the FTLRP (along with farm workers and youths), in practice this was far from the case. As Matondi documents, women had difficulty applying for land and, also, were often overlooked by the men who were in charge of redistributing it, meaning that, as in the Communal Areas, few women gained access to land on their own: “The land resettlement programme has therefore perpetuated customary property rights in favour of men” (p.201).

The final argument Matondi makes, which counters those who blindly celebrate the land reforms as some panacea for Zimbabwe, is that the process has been highly politicized, which has strongly coloured the social organization of the resettlement areas while affecting the type of state institutions. Given their over-determining role in the highly politicized occupations, Matondi shows how ZANU (PF) politics still influences social relations. As he plainly put it, “resettled people assumed that everyone belonged to ZANU-PF, and expected everyone to conform to the dictates of the party in many ways” (p. 216). Part and parcel of this politicization was what he calls a “culture of fear,” given the undercurrent of violence and threats which are found in the conduct of electoral politics in Zimbabwe. Moreover, ZANU (PF) actively helped to undermine state institutions through the FTLRP. “ZANU(PF) as a political party provided revolutionary leadership to the land reform programme, and in the process maligned, marginalized and captured state bodies so as to rally them behind its objective of taking land for redistribution to the majority” (p. 187).

Nonetheless, Matondi also points out, there was broad support for the massive land redistribution exercise amongst ordinary Zimbabweans, even if ZANU (PF) had not pursued this in its first two decades of rule, only doing so when they were several challenged by the MDC. As he astutely observes: “the promises of the FTLRP reached to the depths of the suffering caused by landlessness, but also drew on the betrayal of war heroes and the virtues they stood for – they had been promised land, but this issue had remained unresolved for 20 years” (p. 238).

After such a thorough analysis, Matondi then makes a number of suggestions that could be pursued to “create a prosperous future for the land transfers.” These include resolving compensation to the evicted commercial farmers, addressing land tenure uncertainties, and rebuilding state institutions and curtailing extra-legal political

bodies, amongst others. With such steps, Matondi suggests that the farmers could be more productive and contribute to Zimbabwe's development.

For anyone interested in Zimbabwe and southern Africa, these three books are essential reads. These perceptive Zimbabwean scholars provide analytically sharp and substantive insight into the political economy of crisis in this country. They are useful correctives to often simplistic portrayals of the country – either by those who caricature it as a “basket-case” in Africa or those who naively view ZANU (PF) as the defenders of the majority of Zimbabweans. Moreover, given the important insights one can learn about state, governance, economies and land redistribution from Zimbabwe, these books offer insight into these important topics. As commentators try to understand how ZANU (PF) won the last election, these books provide great insight into how it occurred and what are the political and economic dimensions which will shape its new period of rule.

Blair Rutherford

Department Sociology and Anthropology and Director,
Institute of African Studies, Carleton University,
Ottawa, Canada.