

This easy-to-read book thus has much to recommend it to readers in Africa and the rest of the world. Nevertheless, the narrative is marked by seemingly avoidable weaknesses that will be apparent to specialists in Kenyan history. The latter will recognize the difficulty involved in writing a short chapter on Kenya's colonial history, but the simplicity of the account opens the door to danger in the form of inaccuracies and tropes being seen as facts by nonspecialists. There are far too many errors with dates; for example Jomo Kenyatta did not become president in 1963 and Kenya did not become a colony and protectorate in 1905. The authors claim that "a by-election in 1969 made Kenya a de facto one-party state" (63), but the specifics provided indicate that the observation applies to the 1969 general election (technically a KANU primary). Nevertheless, these matters do not detract from the enlightening and stimulating analysis that forms the core of the book.

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Charles Laurie. *The Land Reform Deception: Political Opportunism in Zimbabwe's Land Seizure Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xvi + 398 pp. Acknowledgments. Figures. Tables. Map. Notes. Index. \$99.99. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0-19-939829-4.

As I was writing this review in January 2017, the outgoing chief justice of the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe, Godfrey Chidyausiku, publicly noted that when he was named to his position in July 2001, he was confronted with the then ongoing, and nationally and internationally controversial, land redistribution program. He declared that the decision to repossess the land was a political and not a legal decision; however, he added, his efforts were directed toward ensuring the process was conducted legally.

This (disputable) claim shows that this dramatic land transfer process of around ten million hectares from almost exclusive white (mainly Zimbabwean) farmers to black Zimbabweans that formally began in 2000 continues to be a public issue within and beyond Zimbabwe. Charles Laurie's *The Land Reform Deception: Political Opportunism in Zimbabwe's Land Seizure Era* provides a timely and very informative contribution to the scholarly debate concerning this process.

Laurie's book builds a case to challenge a dominant portrayal of land redistribution in Zimbabwe that claims it was (what Laurie calls) a "genuine exercise" to address colonial-era racialized land inequalities: a portrayal not only promoted by the Zimbabwean government of Robert Mugabe and its supporters but also one that has been given credence by recent scholarship. The book builds on the impressive research Laurie

did for his doctoral thesis—including a survey of more than fourteen hundred (mostly displaced) white commercial farmers and 111 interviews with (mostly) white farmers, senior farm workers, and, more impressively, officials in the Zimbabwean security services, among others (though more information on the research process, including how he selected those he interviewed and surveyed, would have been helpful). Laurie clearly demonstrates the political nature of the exercise, including the ways in which it shaped the very judicial institutions whose independence Chief Justice Chidyausiku was claiming to uphold.

Some of the main strengths of *The Land Reform Deception* lie in its detailed analysis of the emergence of this comprehensive land redistribution exercise and how it was conducted. Laurie makes a convincing case that the Mugabe government never intended to carry out such massive land redistribution. Rather, the book documents how the ZANU (PF) government lost control over what it intended to be a small-scale land occupation movement after the government's defeat in the February 2000 referendum on a proposed constitution. He also illustrates how party politics, particularly the initially desperate efforts by ZANU (PF) to confront a new and very popular opposition party (the MDC led by Morgan Tsvangirai), were integral not only to the haphazard planning processes, but especially to how the land redistribution actually occurred.

In seven substantive chapters (out of ten in total), Laurie provides a fine-grained analysis of the shifting sociopolitical dynamics of what he calls the “land seizures” starting in February 2000. In these chapters he presents a lot of rich and fresh material, including numerous maps and figures summarizing diverse data, which will be of great interest to scholars of land redistribution and African politics. He details the changing composition of the land occupiers and shifts in their motives (particularly the interest in looting movable property compared to gaining access to land), the range of often violent tactics they used, and some of the responses of white farmers (and to a lesser extent, farm workers) to these confrontations. His analysis of what he calls different “protection schemes” which some white farmers found themselves negotiating with different land occupiers and leaders within ZANU (PF) is incredibly insightful. This book thus directly challenges some of the prevailing arguments that minimize or bracket off politics in their analyses of this transformative process.

Like most scholars and commentators on this divisive topic, Laurie has an agenda. Although he writes that this was a “balanced enquiry” (294) whose evidence he was simply following, he also notes in the first appendix that the book was motivated by questions that “go to the heart of ZANU-PF's right to hold power in Zimbabwe, the legality of the farm seizures and the culpability of lawbreakers in widespread acts of violence” (295). In so doing, as he seeks to reject the claims by the government, he downplays and does not engage with arguments in the wider literature concerning important dynamics in Zimbabwe. To give but one example, his assertion that land redistribution was simply a tool by ZANU (PF) to hoodwink its supporters,

with very limited appeal for many rural Zimbabweans, challenges substantial historical and ethnographic research prior to 2000 (which is not addressed). This does not necessarily mean that the majority of Zimbabweans supported the post-2000 land transfers, but it does mean that land and colonial-era injustices have mattered for many rural Zimbabweans independently of (and sometimes even against) the ruling party's views.

These are points that should spark further discussion and debate. Nonetheless, it is a testament to the fine scholarship of *The Land Reform Deception* that it will surely be taken up by many as they grapple to understand this important period in Zimbabwe's history, its consequences for the country, and its resonances far beyond its borders.

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POLITICS, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, AND GLOBALIZATION

Sara Rich Dorman. *Understanding Zimbabwe: From Liberation to Authoritarianism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. viii + 348 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$27.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-19-063488-9.

Sara Rich Dorman's *Understanding Zimbabwe* is an important and interventionist text on contemporary Zimbabwean politics. Indeed, writing about Zimbabwean recent history and politics can be both a courageous and perilous endeavor. In 2009, for instance, a heated scholarly debate ensued in response to Mahmood Mamdani's essay in the *London Review of Books* (December) that he titled "Lessons of Zimbabwe." The article received an excoriating critique from thirty-five Zimbabweanist and Zimbabwean scholars who accused this accomplished scholar of a woefully jaundiced perspective on postcolonial Zimbabwe and concluded that "intellectuals such as Mamdani should display more responsibility and less posturing in their attempts to draw meaningful lessons from Zimbabwe" (see "Letters," <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n01/letters>). Dorman's book does more than offer a responsible analysis of contemporary Zimbabwe; it also dispels myths and shallow analyses of the recent Zimbabwean past.

As Dorman observes at the outset, scholarly analyses of not just Zimbabwe, but of African politics in general, are mostly animated by contemporaneous debates and concerns, to the detriment of explaining change and continuity. *Understanding Zimbabwe* makes an emphatic case for the historical interconnections in political processes that have shaped the political evolution of the Zimbabwean nation, from the 1970s anticolonial nationalist period to the post-2000 era. Even as Dorman builds on the rich scholarly treatises on Zimbabwean politics, she diverges sharply from the