

Many of Matondi's findings directly contradict those of Hanlon *et al.* On agricultural production, Matondi argues that despite recent improvements most crops fall short of potential output. Surprisingly, however, he pays little attention to tobacco, which has become an important cash crop for many smallholders. On gender, Hanlon *et al.* write that 'women have benefited significantly from the Fast Track Land Reform' (p. 171), but Matondi describes the FTLRP as a 'lost opportunity' for women (p. 207). There are some successful women farmers, but many are struggling because they lack inputs, credit, and markets, and women are particularly vulnerable.

Matondi's methods (household surveys, focus groups, etc.) are also more robust, engaging directly with farmers in three districts – Mazowe, Shamva, and Mangwe – enabling him to show how experiences of the FTLRP vary between sites of different agricultural potential, and how differences in local politics shape resettlement. Some chapters are based on data from Mazowe only, but Matondi is generally more cautious in his conclusions than Hanlon *et al.*

In short, readers looking for a well-informed, comprehensive, measured and evidence-based analysis of the FTLRP should opt for *Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform*.

*Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh*

GARETH D. JAMES  
g.d.james@sms.ed.ac.uk  
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**The Great African Land Grab: Agricultural investments and the global food system**, by Lorenzo Cotula. London and New York, NY: Zed Books in association with the International African Institute, Royal African Association and World Peace Foundation, 2013. x + 238 pp. £12.99 (paperback). ISBN 978 1 78032 420 3.

Lorenzo Cotula's book provides a great summary of the recent literature on land grabbing in Africa, lightened up with colourful and detailed case studies from his own research across a range of African countries. The picture he paints of land grabbing in Africa is a complex one, shaped by its historical antecedents and driven by national and international interests and actors alike. However, Cotula manages to break down complexity, intersect it, and analyse it in a way that is both interesting and highly informative.

Throughout the book Cotula makes an effort to challenge a range of commonly held assumptions about the drivers, the extent, and the impacts of land grabbing in Africa. One of his recurring arguments concerns the often neglected 'historicity' of current land deals. While land grabbing is often discussed in an ahistorical way, Cotula argues that 'the commoditization of land has been going on for a very long time, and the land rush merely constitutes an acceleration of that process' (p. 177). In line with other authors published in this journal (see Pauline Peters, 112, 449, October 2113), he reminds us that only by looking back at colonialism and land acquisitions made after colonialism can we possibly understand today's land rush and the impact it is having on the continent. By designating vast tracts of land as vacant and vesting them in the state, devaluing customary rights to land as mere 'use

rights', and by considerably strengthening the power of traditional chiefs and consequently remoulding the relationship between chiefs and citizens from one 'based on political allegiance and supply of military services ... into an economic relationship between a landlord and a tenant' (p. 19), the colonial era significantly shaped many countries' legal frameworks and political systems.

The author's second recurring and related argument concerns the fact that recent large-scale land acquisitions do not by themselves create land scarcity and inequality, but tend to occur in contexts that are already characterized by increasing land scarcity and social differentiation. He argues that in many African contexts a quieter, much less publicized form of land acquisition from below has been going on for many years, as wealthy nationals have used their money and political leverage to buy up land in rural areas, for small business ventures or simply as financial assets. This 'slower, less visible, longer-term process of accumulation' (p. 174) provides the breeding ground for conflicts and social differentiation, which are increased by today's transnational and national large-scale land acquisitions for agriculture and biofuels.

The book also provides a huge array of evidence concerning the effects that large-scale land acquisitions have on local people in a variety of African countries. While there are always winners and losers, the general picture Cotula paints is one in which the presumed 'trade-off between land and jobs' (p. 127) actually manifests itself in situations in which jobs are few and often unskilled, and alternative livelihood options are lacking, leading to widening social inequalities, increased landlessness, and irreversible changes in systems of tradition and values. While arguing that the 'distributive effects of land deals can benefit poorer and more marginalized groups' (p. 135), the general evidence he provides rather seems to point to the fact that 'those who stand to gain the most from the deals across the continent are national and local elites' (p. 134).

When describing the legal background against which land grabbing occurs, Cotula, who holds a PhD in Law, is arguably at his best. He applies, in language accessible to a layperson, his extensive knowledge of the legal framework that provides the context for land acquisitions, ranging from national laws relating to land, natural resources, the environment, water, and investment through to international investment laws and human rights law. He then guides the reader through the various guarantees that governments commonly provide to investors and the little, albeit disturbing, evidence available relating to the contracts investors have signed with the relevant authorities. His recommendations consequently aim at a 'rights without illusions' approach, which combines legal strategies with political action (p. 123), and could thus create pressure towards accountability and further the empowerment of local people.

The main shortcoming of the book is probably its misleading title. Those expecting a thorough analysis of the way agricultural investments shape or are shaped by the broader global food system might be slightly disappointed by Cotula's rather few and dispersed references to it. While his view of land acquisitions as 'part of wider vertical integration strategies' (p. 171) by individual corporate actors aiming to control large parts of the food system is interesting, he fails to go deeper to substantiate his claims and to analyse what this would mean for the global food system and its components – food production, processing, distribution, and consumption.

Nevertheless, this book should be top of the reading list for anyone new to the topic of land grabbing, and also provides a very timely and interesting summary of recent scholarship for those already engaged in the study of land in Africa.

*University of Berne*

KRISTINA LANZ  
 kristina.lanz@giub.unibe.ch  
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**Bulawayo Burning: The social history of a Southern African city 1893-1960**, by Terence Ranger. Woodbridge and Harare: James Currey, an imprint of Boydell and Brewer, and Weaver Press, 2010. ix + 261pp. £45.00 (hardback). ISBN 978 1 84701 020 9.

This is an illuminating study of the social history of Bulawayo in the period between 1893 and 1960. The book is divided into historical epochs marked by the 'burning' of Bulawayo, metaphorically and literally. It begins with the burning of Bulawayo in 1893 on the orders of King Lobengula, and ends with the burning of shops during the *Zhii* riots of 1960. It thus presents the city of Bulawayo as a site of struggle between many sections of society during the colonial period.

Inspired by Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning*, and writing in response to it, Ranger experiments with a writing style that allows him to locate his study between conventional history and literature. *Bulawayo Burning* is, therefore, in constant conversation with Yvonne Vera's novel, which is set in the city of Bulawayo in 1946. In fact, it is the intricate detail in the novel that inspired Ranger to write a historical study set in the same period and context.

The book takes a biographical approach to history, making use of biographies of different personalities who competed in representing the city. These include white settlers and Africans, women and men, youth and the elderly, modernists and traditionalists, foreigners and locals, among other groups. All these sections of society claimed and fought for their rights to the city. Ranger also adopts the style of pauses, which he borrows from Vera's *Butterfly Burning*, so as to do away with linear and hegemonic versions of history. Thus instead of presenting a linear narrative he adopts the idea of 'becoming'. In doing this he has succeeded in producing a book in which no one is quite sure of what was to come in the succeeding years.

In contrast with previous works, influenced by the political economy approach, such as Charles van Onselen and Ian Phimister's (1979) article on the 1929 Bulawayo faction fights, which largely viewed Africans as labourers, in *Bulawayo Burning* Ranger sees Africans not only as labourers but also as important participants in the making (and unmaking) of the city. In spite of the hardships they faced, former inhabitants of such townships are able to reminisce fondly about their dance groups and township sports, as well as their political heroes and heroines. In the end, the grimness of many aspects of life in the locations is juxtaposed with the conviviality created by Africans through music, dance, and beer drinking, among other activities.