

Book Reviews

Bratton, Michael, *Power Politics in Zimbabwe*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2016, 280 pp.

Zimbabwe's power sharing government (PG) was formed in February 2009 between the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) led by Robert Mugabe, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) led by Morgan Tsvangirai and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-M) led by Arthur Mutambara after seven months of negotiations mediated by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to end a political impasse after inconclusive and disputed elections in 2008. This was preceded by the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) on 15 September 2008 which provided the framework for the establishment of the PG. Although the PG came to an end on 31 July 2013, after yet another disputed election returned ZANU-PF and Mugabe to power, it remains one of the most recent PGs in Africa. A corpus of literature in the form of books, essay collections and journal articles has since been published during and after Zimbabwe's PG. Much of that literature concurs that the political settlement rejuvenated and gave a new lease of life to ZANU-PF which had almost reached a political dead end in 2008. Michael Bratton's *Power Politics in Zimbabwe* is an important contribution to that burgeoning literature.

As one of the leading political scientists on Africa, Bratton has written, in accessible language, arguably the most comprehensive book to date on Zimbabwe's PG. Broadly, it complements a multiplicity of recent literature on PGs in Africa by a host of other prominent scholars, including A Carl LeVan, Ian S Spears, Denis M Tull, Nic Cheeseman, Blessing-Miles Tendi, Norma Kriger, Brian Raftopoulos, Andreas Mehler, Donald Rothchild, Philip G Roeder, Chandra Lekha Sriram, Marie-Joëlle Zahar and Anna K Jarstad among others. Although there are a number of journal articles and edited essays on PGs in Africa, Bratton's book is one of a handful of single authored studies focussing on one country, even as it makes comparative reference to other African countries.

There are three striking approaches which make this book different from other books and edited essay collections on Zimbabwe's PG. Firstly, the book takes an historical approach by tracing pre-colonial traditions, colonial and post-colonial political and military conflicts and subsequent political settlements which established precedence for the recent PG.

Secondly, the study takes a comparative approach by putting Zimbabwe's PG in the broader context of similar political arrangements in countries such as South Africa, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Burundi and Sudan. Thirdly, the study problematises issues by applying theory to explain challenges in the transition to democracy. For example, the reluctance of dominant elites to relinquish power is explained and theorised in terms of superstructure biases in state institutions and legal systems which favour them. Authoritarianism is explained in terms of the legacy of the liberation struggle which makes those who participated in it feel entitled to rule for ever — even without popular approval. At the same time, the author opens chapters by discussing the key literature or concepts on the theme. It is this multi-disciplinary, comparative and theoretical approach which will give *Power Politics in Zimbabwe* longevity on the book shelf.

Bratton argues that while the GPA was a compromise document to facilitate political reform, it could not end acrimony and distrust between the major political parties (p 126). Although these acknowledged the concerns and demands of their rivals, they remained intransigent over key differences. Bratton posits that ZANU-PF authoritarianism, which burgeoned in the 2000s, was transmitted into the PG with negative consequences for the governance and democratic goals which the GPA sought to achieve. There was no guarantee that Mugabe and ZANU-PF will not renege on the GPA because the party had violated previous political agreements on land, elections and constitutional reform. From the onset, the GPA created conditions for policy deadlock in constitution making, electoral reforms, security sector reforms and transitional justice.

Bratton condemned the political elites of both ZANU-PF and MDC for colluding in making a new constitution which failed to meet procedural standards and ignored voices of civil society organisations, all for political convenience (pp 159-160). The new constitution did not do enough to limit executive power vested in the President. Under the new constitution, the President continued to exercise excessive powers such as appointing cabinet ministers, security chiefs, permanent secretaries, judges, traditional leaders, and heads of commissions at his discretion. Bratton argues that the PG failed to rein in security chiefs who remained partisan in favour of ZANU-PF and who opposed political concessions to the MDCs, let alone security sector reforms (pp 200-201). The defence forces interfered with economic affairs by involving themselves in the mining sector particularly the diamond mine fields discovered in the eastern part of the country and in the process denying the Ministry of Finance and the nation an important

source of revenue (pp 130, 202).

Bratton posits that transitional justice for past abuses was blocked by ZANU-PF politicians, security forces and the judiciary (p 228). In addition, the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation, and Integration, which was established during the early days of the PG, was viewed with contempt by the security forces and war veterans. To make matters worse, it lacked the resources and professional staff to execute its duties (p 221). Bratton states that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission did not have enough financial resources and a clear time table to run a credible election (pp 182-183). These reasons, among others, disenfranchised most MDC supporters in urban areas. As far as the electoral environment in 2013 was concerned, Bratton argues that the political landscape was, once again, tilted in favour of ZANU-PF. The state broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, gave more airtime to ZANU-PF than to other political parties. Bratton's major argument throughout the book is that PGs are not the best way of bringing democratic rule because the dominant political elites maintain their stranglehold on state power and prevent real power sharing (p 11).

Despite its merits, this book cannot escape criticism. The book ignores many ZANU-PF voices and views on the PG. This is in sharp contrast to the fact that it uses Robert Mugabe's photograph on its front cover. A closer look at key individuals which Bratton interacted with in the writing of this book, as listed in the acknowledgements, and a careful reading of the text and endnotes, reveals that he mainly captured the views of the 'opposition' and 'reformers' at the expense of 'hardliners' in ZANU-PF. This marginalisation of ZANU-PF views leads to another problem. Throughout the book Bratton tends to view the MDC parties as hapless victims of the perpetrator, ZANU-PF. The reviewer is not trying to absolve ZANU-PF of direct and subtle tendencies to resort to violence and repression. However, this victimhood label seems to have been taken to the extent of removing all blemish and even agency from the MDC parties. Corruption by elected MDC-T officials in urban councils and the lavish lifestyles of its top officials who ascended to leading positions in the government tainted the party's image. MDC-T and MDC-M supporters cannot be exonerated from cases of intra and inter-party violence. These parties schemed against each other, most notably in the appointment of the speaker of parliament. The egos of their leaders who could not unite their parties over key reform issues contributed to their disastrous political outmanoeuvring by ZANU-PF and consequent defeat in the 2013 elections. Nor does Bratton pay sufficient attention to the role played by West-

ern 'sanctions' in shaping relations between political parties in the PG. ZANU-PF manipulated Western sanctions to the fullest advantage by refusing to fulfill its GPA obligations "until they were removed" and to mobilise support in the 2013 election campaign. It gave Mugabe and ZANU-PF the opportunity to present themselves as victims. They took the anti-imperialist rhetoric to a crescendo, in the process gaining sympathy from SADC and the African Union and complicating negotiations for political and governance reforms required during the tenure of the PG.

But that said, this book is an important contribution to knowledge and will be useful to academics and students in disciplines such as political science and history who want to understand the merits and perils of power sharing. Power Politics in Zimbabwe is no less important for policy makers, political mediators and politicians who might find themselves tempted to form PGs in future.

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Jerven, Morten, *Africa. Why Economists Get It Wrong*. London: Zed Books 2015, 160 pp.

Morten Jerven has in recent years occupied an important niche and discourse as regards assessments of economic development in countries in sub-Saharan Africa. By deconstructing the common assumptions guiding most of the econometric exercises leading to all sorts of prognoses, he has challenged the mystification practised by mainstream economists. This has made him unpopular not only among those Western colleagues long considered to be the ultimate authorities on economic assessments of development trends in African economies, but also those in charge of statistics in African countries, who did not always treat him with respect.

As Jerven summarises, "the response was not always polite and was not always limited to collegial replication studies; some officials in statistical offices in the region felt personally aggrieved, to the extent that the Zambia Statistical Office accused me of being 'a hired gun meant to discredit African National Accountants'". This was linked to the accusation that he would only aim to create more room for European consultants (p 122). Meanwhile, most such consultants and experts are part of the