Zimbabwe Takes Back Its Land, by Joseph Hanlon, Jeanette Manjengwa, and Teresa Smart. Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, an imprint of Stylus Publishing, 2013. ix + 245 pp. £19.95/$26.95 (paperback) ISBN 978 1 56549 520 3.
Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform, by Prosper B. Matondi. Uppsala, London, and New York, NY: Nordic Africa Institute and Zed Books, 2012. xvii + 286 pp. £21.99/$39.95 (paperback) ISBN 978 1 78032 148 6.

There is no question that the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), which began in 2000, has transformed the agrarian structure of Zimbabwe radically. The question, or sets of questions, at the centre of this debate now focus on how the FTLRP has played out, and how it continues to unfold, at the local level. These two relatively new additions to the literature offer the reader a chance to further explore this set of hotly debated issues.

Zimbabwe Takes Back Its Land aims to uncover 'the reality on the ground in 2012' (p. 13), and is 'about the new farmers … about their successes and failures' (pp. 14–15). The first five chapters look at colonialism and the first two decades of independence; chapters 6 to 9 cover the FTLRP and the situation in 2012; and the remaining chapters discuss unresolved issues, including women's land rights (Chapter 10), environmental concerns (Chapter 11), farm labour, irrigation, and tenure security (Chapter 12). The authors assert that new farmers have been 'successful'; that they are more productive than the former white farmers; that productivity continues to rise; and that living standards are improving. The book is described as a 'comprehensive' and 'balanced' account of Zimbabwe's FTLRP, 'written with journalistic passion and scholarly rigour' (back cover). However, it is problematic in a number of ways.

The title itself is misleading, implying a single Zimbabwean identity, ignoring wider questions of citizenship, identity, and belonging. After all, many 'Zimbabweans' failed to benefit from the FTLRP, including many farmworkers, youths, women, the disabled, and even war veterans. These 'losers' do not fit the narrative, so they are largely ignored. The title and narrative also obscure the many conflicts that took place, and continue to play out, at the local and national level, which extend beyond simple dichotomies of black versus white, or colonial versus post-colonial. This broad-brush approach extends to the authors' treatment of Zimbabwean history, and specifically the history of land, which at times reflects the narrow and exclusive 'patriotic history' propagated by ZANU-PF since 2000/1.

Hanlon *et al.* also tend to misrepresent opposing arguments. On elite land-grabbing, they write: 'If we are to object to big farms being held by an elite, it means objecting to the whole system of having A2 and large-scale farms, because only an elite can afford the investment' (p. 90). This is a deliberate oversimplification of the 'crony' argument – a straw man. They offer no solid data to support the argument that it was largely the poor and landless who benefited. Instead, they write: 'Undoubtedly some [beneficiaries] are political elites … which *we guess* to be 5 per cent of farmers and 10 per cent of land' (p. 99, my emphasis).

The six criteria for 'success' (pp.112–14) are obvious. The fact that farming requires capital, knowledge, investment, and hard work is far from ground-breaking. The authors correctly state that 'there is no single measure of "success"' (p. 118), so they also present income and production data. While these conventional measures

are important, they are narrow and limited, ignoring local perceptions of 'success' and 'failure', 'wealth' and 'poverty'. Rural households seek to create livelihood portfolios, and total household income is often a mixture of agricultural production, employment, remittances, and natural resource utilization. This complexity is not captured by crop production and income statistics alone, especially when they too are incomplete (there is absolutely no mention of livestock sales or production, for example).

Furthermore, the authors' data fail to account for seasonal cycles in rural livelihoods. They attempt to plot livelihood trajectories, concluding that: 'On average, the fast track farmers are doing well … and over the next decade can be expected to continue growing' (p. 210). Their data do not allow them to generalize in this way, and predictions of continued growth are purely speculative. There is simply not enough of a longitudinal perspective to substantiate these claims – this can only be achieved by revisiting the same farmers over an extended period.

The primary weakness of the book, therefore, is its flawed methodology. The authors extrapolate from a sample of 102 farmers situated in Mazowe district on 'some of the richest farmland' in Zimbabwe (p. 122). There is no description of the sampling process, and no explanation for the decision to 'survey' these specific farms. The result is a series of hasty generalizations based on limited data taken from an unrepresentative sample, with some selective evidence from other studies used to fill the gaps. This includes uncritical use of 'official' statistics that are notoriously unreliable (for example, the rainfall statistics on pp. 50–1).

The book's only strength lies in its attempt to give a voice to the beneficiaries themselves, who are often drowned out in a debate that has tended to be pitched at the national level. However, even these personal narratives are limited because, as the authors themselves concede, 'a handful of examples, good or bad, proves nothing' (p. 112).

Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform, on the other hand, is altogether more rewarding. Matondi also aims 'to show what happened on the ground' (p. 2), but his analysis is more comprehensive and nuanced, benefiting from ten years of collaborative field-based research. Chapters 1 to 3 draw an important distinction between land occupations, acquisitions, and subsequent allocations. These are often treated as one, but they are distinct, with their own sets of questions, which Matondi tackles without the ideological biases that taint other studies. Overall, he argues that 'there is no question that the land transfers have provided the majority of people with new opportunities' (p. 236), but that 'challenges have limited the realisation of the full potential of the land taken' (p. 237). These challenges include tenure security (Chapter 4), agricultural productivity (Chapter 5), access to services (Chapter 6), women's land rights (Chapter 7), and social organization (Chapter 8).

Matondi is at his best when writing about tenure security. He successfully captures the ongoing conflicts and remaining uncertainties of land ownership, and argues that unresolved issues are preventing farmers from 'getting on with the business of farming' (p. 128). The fact that some farmers are simulating land use to avoid repossession by the state has been missed elsewhere, which illustrates Matondi's ability to uncover not only farmers' insecurities but also the more obscure aspects of resettlement.

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
doi: 10.1093/afraf/adu008

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