

## Rezensionen / Reviews

**BRATTON, Michael. 2016. *Power Politics in Zimbabwe*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 281 pp. ISBN 978-1-62637-388-4.**

*reviewed by*

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With the fast growing literature on politics in Zimbabwe, particularly since 2000, one of the great challenges of writing a book on the subject is how to add something substantially new to this body of literature. In the past Mike Bratton's work has made a valuable contribution to this debate. Working with Eldred Masunungure at the Mass Public Opinion Institute in Zimbabwe both scholars have provided timely insights into public perceptions of the changing politics of Zimbabwe. Bratton's *Power Politics in Zimbabwe* therefore provides a good synthesis of his insights into Zimbabwe's post-colonial politics with a particular focus on the period of the power sharing Government of National Unity from 2009-2013.

The major difficulty for specialists on Zimbabwe is to find new insights in the book. The three chapters in Part One of the book are a summary of a well-known history of Zimbabwean politics from the colonial period until 2008. The literature on this period is abundant and Bratton provides a useful contextual overview of this history, with a view to setting the scene for the continuing legacy of political violence and intolerance, and their implications for the post-colonial settlement. Bratton summarises this legacy with the conclusion that 'the independence settlement allowed the ruling elite to develop a repertoire of political controls that drew on the colonial legacy.' (p. 69)

The central concern of the book is an examination of the challenges of the SADC facilitated power-sharing agreement in Zimbabwe in the aftermath of the highly contested national elections in 2008. After providing a good overview of the context in which the Global Political Agreement (GPA) came into effect, Bratton provides more detailed discussion of four aspects of the GPA: The writing of a new constitution; the difficulties of improving electoral conduct; security sector reform; and transitional justice questions. Bratton correctly identifies the key limitations of reforms in all these areas and the major ways in which the lack of substantive progress over these issues impeded the possibility of a democratic transition in Zimbabwe.

In explaining the reasons for the blockages Bratton provides his key conceptual framework. In his words the book attempts to move beyond the explanatory focus on 'big man' politics and in particular the centrality of Robert Mugabe as a singular figure in Zimbabwe's crisis. Instead the author moves towards 'an alternative emphasis on the broader civil-military coalition that surrounded a supremo and the bevy of institutions and practices they assembled to prop up an exclusive regime' (p. 235). Within this framework there is little room for any discussion of the popular support that Zanu PF has managed to maintain through, amongst other processes, a combination of coercion, the continued resonance of the liberation struggle messaging and the various cultural constructions deployed by the regime to enlist support, as well as the complexities of the land reform process. The emphasis of the book is on the power politics of regime survival. In making his argument Bratton carefully locates the Zimbabwean power sharing agreement within the comparative experiences of other such agreements on

the African continent and in so doing sets out the particular challenges of Zimbabwe's GPA more clearly.

Overall the book provides a good overview of Zimbabwe's attempt at power-sharing, locating this period within the longer history of Zimbabwean politics. For readers unfamiliar with this history Bratton's volume provides a helpful introduction to the subject. However for Zimbabwean specialists the book contains few surprises as much of the discussion has been well rehearsed in other publications. In particular the central role of the military and its institutional support for the ruling party and its Presidency has been one of the long-standing concerns of analysts of the Zimbabwean problem. Bratton's book makes a valuable addition to these long-term concerns.

As Zimbabwe moves towards the end of the Mugabe era the challenges highlighted in Bratton's book, and that of other recent contributions on this subject, will become increasingly important to address. Constitutionalism, improvements in electoral conduct, security sector reforms and transitional justice concerns, will for a long time remain key issues in confronting the legacies of authoritarian rule in Zimbabwe.