

identity. Black women were held hardly to have personalities, let alone appearances.

Ingutsheni was the subject of one of those vastly illuminating Rhodesian Commissions of Inquiry. It was inevitably called upon in the many discussions of African mentalities – or of white colonial tendencies to madness. After Zimbabwean independence in 1980 the inimitable Herbert Ushewokunze, Minister of Health, with whom Jackson both starts and finishes her book, used reforms at Ingutsheni (and the unshackling of a chained lunatic in the communal areas) as a symbol of national emancipation.

Jackson comes to some surprising conclusions as a result of her focus on Ingutsheni. One of them concerns so-called ‘responsible government’, which the settlers achieved in 1923. We are so used to the fact that the late 1920s saw a move from ‘civilization to segregation’ and that the early 1930s witnessed an economic depression that undercut all development, that we have not considered other meanings of ‘responsible’. But Jackson writes: ‘as the power of settlers rose they demanded more responsible government, which coincided with a changing worldwide view of mental health care as more curative than custodial. In Southern Rhodesia, this resulted in a mental health system that restored “social usefulness” according to a settler colonial social order. Southern Rhodesian psychiatric care became more interventionist and began to imagine a socially productive role for itself, the production of recovered colonial citizens and subjects’ (p. 67). Jackson writes of ‘Southern Rhodesia’s reinvention as a modern, self-governing settler society’ (p. 134). She shows how sensitive Rhodesian settlers were to metropolitan criticism and how they often turned to South African experts as a solution, combining as they did science and segregationism. These and many other insights make this a fascinating book.

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## THE CENTRAL ROLE OF LAND IN ZIMBABWEAN HISTORY

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*The Unsettled Land. State-making & the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893–2003.*

By JOCELYN ALEXANDER. Oxford: James Curry, 2006. Pp. x+230. £50 (ISBN 0-85255-893-5); £18.95, paperback (ISBN 0-85255-892-9).

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In March 2007, the Brussels-based International Crisis Group argued that ‘after years of political deadlock and continued economic and humanitarian decline, a realistic chance has at last begun to appear in the past few months to resolve the Zimbabwe crisis, by retirement of President Robert Mugabe, a power-sharing transitional government, a new constitution and elections’. For all that elements of the report had the appearance of a wish-list rather than a likely scenario, as recent events have confirmed, it served to re-focus attention on Zimbabwe’s agony. And at the very heart of this intractable crisis lay the state’s violent answer to the longstanding land question, whether defined by the ruling ZANU-PF party as the radical redress of colonial injustice, or explained by the opposition as a cynical and ruthless ploy designed to cast the government as honest ‘sons of the soil’ defending the hard-won gains of the liberation struggle against the deluded puppets of imperialism.

That land has played a central role in Zimbabwean history is almost a truism. Certainly, from the nineteenth century onwards, it has been fought over repeatedly, even as it has been used and abused. It has always attracted carpet-baggers of one sort or another, and its characteristics, real and imagined, have been invoked in the construction of white as well as black identities. Dozens of novelists, ranging from Gertrude Page through Doris Lessing to Yvonne Vera and Chenjerai Hove, have found inspiration in its multiple meanings, and at least as many academics have scrutinized its pasts. Indeed, land has been the focus of some of Zimbabwe's very best scholarship, the benchmark of which, for thirty years, has been Robin Palmer's *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia*. Scholars whose thoughtful, stimulating and provocative contributions in recent years have never lost sight of land's shifting significance, include Donald Moore, Sam Moyo, Pius Nyambara, Mandivamba Rukuni, and William Wolmer. All of them have sought to explain, from widely differing perspectives and methodologies, the meanings of 'suffering for territory' (the title of Moore's 2005 book). It is this illustrious company that Jocelyn Alexander joins with the publication of her long-awaited *The Unsettled Land. State-making & the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893–2003*.

Over eight chapters, *The Unsettled Land* sets out to chart the making and unmaking of authority over people and the land on which they lived and farmed. It is a story in which 'questions of state-making and ideology, of resistance, coercion and consent, take centre stage'. But where Mahmood Mamdani in his *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, had emphasized the key role played by the 'bifurcated' colonial state and its successor in all of this, Alexander is not persuaded that his one-size-fits-all approach adequately captures the complexity of the process of implementation after policies have been formulated and promulgated. She argues that it is 'in local struggles over power and authority that states must take root' – that is, through a process of engagement with colonial 'subjects', by which 'institutions were built, consent gained, and power given effect'. Thoroughly exploring the terrain occupied by custom and chiefly authority, Alexander demonstrates with great subtlety that it was possible, at one and the same time, to make claims as an ethnic subject and as a citizen.

No-one will read this carefully argued and clearly structured book without learning a lot, whether it concerns the working on the ground of the Land Husbandry Act, or the return of power to the chiefs in the 1960s, or the contested reconstitution of technical developmentalism in the first decade or so after independence in 1980, to take only three prominent examples. Based on wide reading, exhaustive archival research, and repeated field trips, *The Unsettled Land* rarely puts a foot wrong. The weaving of the local and particular into the national and general is done with an exemplary professionalism, as is its critical delineation of anti-colonial nationalism. But while this excellent monograph marks a huge advance on days now thankfully long gone when a fawning micro study could masquerade as an account of the entire country, it may be that *The Unsettled Land* pushes the pendulum too far in the direction of local dynamics. If there is one area that this otherwise nuanced analysis deals with somewhat perfunctorily, it is the current crisis. This would seem to be driven almost entirely by the dictates of a central government, which for all its failings, is far removed from being a failed state. That facts are being created on the ground by local forces is certain, but so far as anyone can tell, they are being established within political boundaries brutally set and ruthlessly policed by Harare.

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