The urban history of mid-twentieth-century Zimbabwe has long inspired historians, particularly in regard to the onset of the Rhodesian Front white-settler regime. Even so, much remains to be investigated about the colonial era. Timothy Scarnecchia’s *Urban Roots of Democracy and Political Violence in Zimbabwe: Harare and Highfield, 1940-1964* explores the development of trade unions and city political movements in Harare in the 1950s and early 1960s. Scarnecchia challenges understandings of how African nationalism in Zimbabwe emerged by highlighting local grassroots actors instead of major leaders, such as Joshua Nkomo or Robert Mugabe. Terence Ranger, the dean of historians of Zimbabwe, takes on the colonial history of Bulawayo, the second largest city in the country whose history has received short shrift in comparison to the capital of Harare. Ranger and Scarnecchia both treat local contexts as crucial for understanding the methods and options available for Zimbabweans seeking redress in the mid-twentieth century. Both monographs thus seek to develop nuances in major narratives of Zimbabwean history, from the evolution of Zimbabwean nationalist politics to urban development.

Scarnecchia’s approach may not highlight the role of urban geography in shaping politics, but it does underline the importance of grassroots ur-
ban movements in influencing the trajectory of nationalism. Trade unionist Charles Mzingeli has often been viewed as a radical from the late 1940s who eventually was co-opted by liberals in the following decade. Scarnecchia argues that this viewpoint imposes an ideological narrative that ignores the rise of violence against supposed “sell-outs” and the urban context of Mzingeli’s career. Mzingeli lived in the Zimbabwean capital of Harare (then Salisbury), and much of his activism was designed to improve the lives of men and women living in township neighborhoods. While some have condemned Mzingeli for working within institutions such as an African advisory board created by segregationist legislation, the board allowed Mzingeli to advocate for better wages and living conditions. He veered from accommodation to resistance to municipal and national authorities as bargaining tools to create loopholes within the 1946 Native (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act (NUAARA) that was designed to create a small permanent stable (and largely male) African urban working class. Single and undocumented married women backed Mzingeli as a means of defending their right to stay in Harare, but male workers often resented these women as competition for jobs. When political competitors to Mzingeli sought out support by the mid-1950s, they found working men willing to abandon their former patron in part because of backlash over female labor in the city. This became particularly clear in the 1956 Harare bus boycott, when supporters of the Salisbury Youth League (SYL) raped some women who refused to stay off public transport. Mzingeli rightly denounced the uncontrolled violence inspired by the SYL, but SYL leaders supported such attacks as a way to achieve nationalist goals.

For Scarnecchia, the riot helped usher in a new era in which politicians used the epithet “sell-out” as a tool to inspire violence against their rivals. Trade unionist Ruben Jamela developed close ties with American unions in the early 1960s, but such moves made him suspect to more radical activists as well as white-settler political groups, such as the Rhodesian Front. Rather than contending that Cold War politics were a crucial factor in how African nationalism developed in Zimbabwe, Scarnecchia argues that politicians, such as Mugabe, used the limited role of U.S. trade unionists as a means of undermining their rivals as tools of imperialism. Backers of the Zimbabwean African People’s Union (ZAPU) led by Nkomo took to the streets to fight Jamela’s union supporters. By 1964, ZAPU’s breakaway competitor, the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU) led by Mugabe, had to defend itself from ZAPU accusations that ZANU were sellouts like Jamela to the Americans. Both ZANU and ZAPU members used beatings to ensure compliance with their protests and at public spaces, including drinking halls and schools. The Rhodesian Front thus had the pretext to declare a state of emergency in African neighborhoods in 1964, and pointed to the intra-African political violence as a justification for continued white domination. Although Scarnecchia’s analysis of the 1950s and early 1960s is quite convincing, one wishes that he brought up the role of lived space in shaping the discourses and actions of urban political actors more effectively at times. On the one hand, one learns little of the geography of Harare or the role of particular neighborhoods. On the other hand, the ways African political and trade union leaders as well as larger numbers of ordinary Zimbabweans engaged with segregationist legislation is clearly evident here.

Ranger’s approach is broader in both chronological scope and thematic interests. Bulawayo has received much less attention from scholars than Harare, even though it was a major economic and cultural hub in the entire country. Bulawayo Burning begins with an overview of the city’s origins in the wake of the defeat of Ndebele ruler Lobengula in the 1890s. Unlike Scarnecchia, Ranger highlights the geographic organization of the city by centering his study on the township of Makokoba. This neighborhood became the biggest
African location in the city. It retained much of its old origins as a Ndebele settlement until the 1930s and 1940s, when many Africans from Zimbabwe and South Africa settled in the city. Its history of segregation was quite similar to that of Harare in some regards, particularly in the overcrowding of African neighborhoods. To some degree, white settlers exacted even more demands on African residents than in Harare, for example, prohibiting Africans from walking on sidewalks through the 1930s. One interesting difference between Harare and Bulawayo lay in the municipal government led by Labour leader Donald Macintyre, who kept taxes on white residents low by spending almost nothing on infrastructure in the African neighborhoods. In the 1940s and 1950s, Macintyre struggled with Governor Godfrey Huggins, who advocated an ideal of segregated housing to promote the formation of a stable African working class. Macintyre rejected these demands on the grounds that building housing would cost too much and that a large class of supposedly temporary workers allowed for more flexibility (and lower salaries for Africans) for European employers. Macintyre's idiosyncratic policies show the limits of government control over settlers and show the populist roots of the Rhodesian Front movement's demand for white supremacy in later years.

Ranger also explores to some degree the cultural and political networks of the city through the person of Sipambaniso Khumalo, an influential figure in Bulawayo from the early 1930s until his death in 1952. This fascinating study denotes how Khumalo rode new trends in urban leisure (music and soccer) to become a prominent trade union leader by the 1940s. Ranger could have engaged the role of cultural networks more, as many Zimbabwean musicians in the 1940s and 1950s started their careers out in the city. Still, Khumalo's ability to recognize the demands of many Makokoba residents and his efforts to use the national government's segregation policies to force Macintyre to improve conditions in the African neighborhoods were remarkable. Similar to Scarnecchia, Ranger also notes how, by the 1950s, the growing numbers of women in the city altered politics, as government leaders tried to restrict the ability of single women to support themselves by banning alcohol production by Africans. The city also was key in the rise of Nkomo, one of the leading African nationalists in the 1960s. Ranger compares Nkomo's engagements with city politics with Jerry Vera, a less-renowned politician nationally who had worked to become a key figure among the growing number of Shona people in the city. Like Scarnecchia, Ranger also examines outbreaks of violence in 1929 and 1960 and places them in the context of local concerns about municipal policy, gender, ethnicity, and frustrations with the white-settler government.

Both books have value beyond readers concerned with Zimbabwe. For scholars examining trade union politics and grassroots politics in other African cities, these monographs serve as models to follow in their use of primary sources and interviews. Upheavals, such as the violence in Kinshasa (then Léopoldville) in January 1959, deserve to be looked at anew with the kind of concern for gender and local concerns furnished by these studies. Scholarship on southern African cities has long led the way in developing the historiography of urban Africa as a whole, and these works show this is still the case in the early twenty-first century.
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