

**‘The Politics of African Development: The Cases of Kenya and Zimbabwe.’  
A Synopsis**

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Kenya and Zimbabwe share a structurally similar colonial experience. Both were ‘settler colonies’ – colonies in which permanent settlement of Europeans on the land was deemed the best method of economic development. In both cases the loss of large tracts of fertile land to whites led to mass African resentment, and in both cases this resentment eventually exploded into violence – in Kenya the ‘Mau Mau’ revolt of the 1950s, in Zimbabwe the nationalist armed struggle against white minority rule of the 1960s and 1970s.

Thereafter however their histories diverge sharply. The 1960 Lancaster House agreement on Kenyan independence included a scheme for the large-scale purchase of European owned land and its resettlement by Africans – a scheme funded by British government ‘soft’ loans. The 1979 negotiations on Zimbabwean independence saw a Thatcherite British government much less inclined to be generous, and a group of nationalist politicians apparently uninterested in treating the matter as a priority. As a result the ‘land issue’ in Kenya was resolved peacefully and with minimal economic disruption, while in Zimbabwe large scale, unplanned, seizures of European owned land from the late 1990s have played a significant part in economic collapse.

My paper endeavours to explain these different histories and to draw some broader political implications from them.