

Internal Migration, Xenophobia, the Politics of Belonging and Identity: Unfolding Realities in the Zimbabwe Land Reform Programme

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Land reform continues to be a key and thorny issue in Zimbabwe's politics. It underpins the country's social, economic and political development processes. However, the pre-occupation at local, regional and international levels with problems inherent in the repossession of predominantly white owned large-scale commercial farms for redistribution to the black majority has tended to gloss over on-going tensions often generated by land reform programmes at local levels. These tensions revolve on issues concerning the difficulties of managing complex equations of ethnicity, rights and social justice issues where xenophobia, local identities, issues of belonging and social exclusion criss-cross each other. The paper shows that internal migration involves many actors with different perceptions of the whole process. For instance local/indigenous groups tend to perceive internal migration as a negative force bringing in 'foreigners' i.e. the newcomers who are seen as invaders posing a threat to both local cultures and ecology. In some instances internal migration is generating resentment and xenophobic reactions as people question entitlement to land in the new dispensation. On the other hand internal migration is seen as a part of the project of nation building and creation of national unity and reclaiming of what rightfully belongs to indigenous groups from settler communities. The paper also examines new identities being played out by various actors to legitimate their claims to land in the era of land reform.