



# Zimbabwe's Migrants and South Africa's Border Farms: The Root of Impermanence

Maxim Bolt

Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2016. 270pp.

*Review by Eugenia Mpofo- Muzenda*

**T**his book is based chiefly on research that was conducted by Maxim Bolt at a family farming estate along the Limpopo valley in the Limpopo province of South Africa.

The book provides an insightful scrutiny of the Zimbabwean situation in relation to its neighbouring country, South Africa. The three phases in which Zimbabweans migrated to South Africa are clearly articulated. The 1st phase was way before Zimbabwe attained its independence in 1980 when Zimbabweans (especially males) left their homes for South African mines for waged employment. The early 1980s were characterized by "tribalistic" fights commonly known as Gukurahundi in Shona. These birthed the exodus of some Ndebele people to South Africa. The next and current phase, which is economically and politically driven, started in the late 1990s. The adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) saw a number of Zimbabweans losing their jobs. The late 1990s and early 2000s were characterised by white farm invasions by local inhabitants which resulted in the land redistribution programme

that was adopted by the Government of Zimbabwe. It is during this period that Zimbabwe had sanctions imposed which restricted it from trading with a number of countries and organisations. As a consequence, a country once known as the bread basket of Africa, started importing basic food commodities such as grain. Many industries closed down. Unemployment and inflation rates skyrocketed. Many Zimbabweans were left with no choice, but to emigrate. It is this last phase that the book focuses: Zimbabweans who left their country for waged employment in the border farms along the Limpopo River.

The book provides a self-evaluation of farmers along the Limpopo River. It is useful to note that these white farmers are a mixture of South African Afrikaners and those who fled Zimbabwe after independence. These white farmers view themselves as visionaries, hard workers as well as fatherly figures to their black employees. They also make a point that farming is not for the fainthearted because loneliness is the order of the day since farmers hardly see each other. The book also highlights the hierarchies on the farm, with whites as either owners or in management positions. Very few blacks occupy management positions and those who do, do not rank with their white counterparts in terms of occupation and salary. With the exception of the

few blacks in the management team, the majority are unskilled waged employees. Power relations on farms are clearly described in the book, showing that permanent workers, who are mostly men, experience a better life when compared with seasonal workers and women. The authors present an account of the harsh life experienced by seasonal workers and the vulnerabilities associated with being a woman on a farm. The book goes further to expose how farm workers, whether permanent or seasonal, are vulnerable in light of the changing economic and political conditions and the need to find alternative employment.

Due to high unemployment in Zimbabwe, it is not uncommon to find skilled and educated people doing menial work such as picking fruits during the harvesting season(s). Owing to its geographical position, the estate and its surroundings, has a unique economy and a lifestyle that includes smuggling and informal trading. The book also explores the issue of remittances (in cash and kind) to Zimbabwe and why it is important to remit that way.

The book assists one to understand the 'Who', 'Why', 'When', 'How' and 'What' questions around the Zimbabwean population in South Africa. The authors also give readers a broader view of the dynamics around the subject of migration. [NA](#)