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## The New Harvest. Agrarian Policies and Rural Transformation in Southern Africa

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# Introduction

Southern Africa is currently experiencing significant rural transformations that remain deeply influenced by the colonial legacy, as well as by more recent contradictory rural development policies. Although with different characteristics, all of the countries in the region are implementing land reform programmes. Land policies draw heavily on a neoliberal framework, currently informing two opposing and at the same time overlapping tendencies: on the one hand land acquisitions by private and public sector actors including local and national elites (the so-called 'land grabs'); on the other hand policies aiming to strengthen smallholder agriculture and the recognition of customary rights to land. Both dynamics add layers of complexity to rural development implementation, including issues of food security in the countryside.

This issue of *afriche e orienti* addresses the multidimensional, and yet, contradictory relationship between rural development policy and agrarian transformation from numerous perspectives, including access and use of land, negotiating rights to resources, food security, democratisation, the emergence of new conflicts, and claims to land. The issue collects six papers presented at the international workshop "The New Harvest. Agrarian Policies and Rural Transformation in Southern Africa", organized by the Departmental Centre for Historical and Political Studies on African and the Middle East in Bologna on 13 March 2015. The international workshop was one of the

concluding events of the research project MIUR/PRIN 2010/11 "State, Plurality, Change in Africa", funded by the Italian Ministry of University. The publication of this issue of *afriche e orienti* was possible thanks to the generous contribution of the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Bologna.

This issue is organised as follows. The two contributions from Mario Zamponi and Pauline E. Peters set the general terms of reference of contemporary issues about agrarian transformation in Southern Africa, and contextualise the region within broader continental and global trends. Through an analysis of contemporary debates on agrarian change Mario Zamponi provides a number of critical insights on private land acquisitions and rural development policies from the perspective of the long-term historical transformations of the peasantries in Southern Africa. Zamponi concludes that the land question – and its historical trajectory – is still relevant today in explaining the challenges faced by increasingly disarticulated and yet globalized rural societies in Southern Africa. In the same direction, Pauline E. Peters provides an explanation of current programs of agricultural development, as well as land acquisitions by national and foreign actors in Southern Africa from the perspective of the interaction between the legacy of colonialism and current dynamics of widening socio-economic inequalities. Peters concludes that these trends pose a growing threat to small- and medium-scale use of landed resources, and provide justification for dispossession of land users operating on customary and communal land.

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The following four articles present case studies from Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania, and address a number of different topics relevant to conceptualise current trends of agrarian transformation in Southern Africa. João Carrilho and Uacitissa Mandamule discuss details of the current Mozambican land policy by tracing its historical background, as well as by exploring the narratives underpinning the decentralization of powers to local bodies and the relationship between statutory law and customary norms in land management and administration. The authors call for a rethinking of the policies on land management and administration in Mozambique, arguing for a balanced approach to power distribution between central and local bodies. Davide Chinigò discusses the changing role of customary authorities in providing access to land as part of the land reform process embarked on by Malawi over the last twenty years. The author shows that the land reform process is informed by conflicting policy priorities, including the attempt to formalize customary tenure as a way to achieve a number of developmental objectives. Chinigò concludes that the very process of formalization is likely to provide customary chiefs with increasing powers over national and local decision-making processes. By drawing on a large dataset Gareth D. James addresses the expansion of contract farming for tobacco and cotton in Zimbabwe since 1980. The evidence provided shows that over time contract farming generated higher incomes for growers and, although only for tobacco, improved yields. However, James concludes that while these findings are significant, the contribution of contract farming

to smallholder agriculture is difficult to generalize and requires a very careful analysis of the broader aspects contributing to the generation of rural livelihoods. Finally, through the analysis of policy-making processes and the implementation of large agricultural commercialization schemes in Tanzania, Emmanuel Sulle questions the alleged positive correlation between land investments and a variety of development goals, including poverty reduction and food and nutritional security. The author contends that the current emphasis on large-scale farming often results in the displacement of small-scale producers, with relevant adverse impacts on rural livelihoods.

Davide Chinigò, editor of this issue

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