Whose Land is it anyway? A Comparative Analysis on Land Reform and how it could benefit the Reform in South Africa

Land is a universal characteristic of power. The colonial experiences in Africa have led to the alteration of power-structures; one of the ways that this has been achieved is by settlers taking land from Africans. Additionally, the colonial experiences in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa involved the preference of white farms in legislation. While both Zimbabwe and Kenya are still in the process of achieving equitable land ownership levels, the fairly recent end of Apartheid in South Africa (1994) has led to the highly-controversial and divisive issue of land reform in an “equal” South Africa.

Contributing to the controversy is the slow-pace at which land reform is being implemented in South Africa. Like South Africa, Zimbabwe initially adhered to market-based principles to achieve an equitable system of land distribution. However, the power structure of this program allowed the landowner to have the upper hand in the negotiating process. This resulted in land either being sold at a high cost or land not being sold at all. Tensions in Zimbabwe grew to a point where land invasions and violence started to occur. These land invasions and violence had tremendous effects on the economic stability as well as the confidence investors had in the country.

In my research, I plan to identify the conditions that cause violence in the land reform process. I have chosen Zimbabwe, Kenya and South Africa due to their similarities and also because they have experienced different levels of violence. Additionally, I may be able to project what South Africa should resist doing. I will do this by examining the pieces of legislation in all of these countries to identify any similarities or differences. Secondly, I will analyze the political conditions of all of these countries to see if some reforms were only possible due to the political climate at that time. Finally, I plan on analyzing the economic impact of these reforms.