

ABSTRACT

This article looks at the role of land and grievances thereto in the post-election violence experienced in Kenya in late 2007 and early 2008. It argues that the failure of post-colonial governments to craft a cohesive and inclusive national agenda for development has resulted in a fragmented populace. This fragmentation militates against a national ethic as the citizenry congregate around their ethnic groupings as a source of security and guaranteed access to resources such as land. Locating their discourse in the history of land relations in Kenya, the authors argue that the violence experienced was part of a sequence of recurrent displacements stemming from unresolved and politically aggravated land grievances, in a context of population growth, poor governance and static socio-economic attitudes reinforced by absence of alternative policies. They propose that to avoid the recurrence of violence over land, immediate steps should be taken to wean Kenyans off land through providing other avenues for wealth creation, creating a hierarchy of values for land and minimising the returns on speculative landholding. For example, fiscal policies imposing high taxes on speculatively-held land that is not under production would contribute to the releasing of land for production or settlement. They also discuss the need to create new nationalities based on imagined or created identities; these are achievable through educational, bureaucratic, cultural and political pilgrimages in Kenya as opposed to the classical ethnic configuration that currently defines Kenyans' allegiances.