

Belonging in South Africa: Networks among African Immigrants and South African Natives

Authors : Efe Mary Isike

Abstract : The variety of relationships between migrants and host communities is an enduring theme of migration studies. On one extreme, there are numerous examples of hostility towards 'strangers' who are either ejected from society or denied access to jobs, housing, education, healthcare and other aspects of normal life. More moderate treatments of those identified as different include expectations of assimilation in which host communities expect socially marginalized groups to conform to norms that they define. Both exclusion and assimilation attempt to manage the problem of difference by removing it. South Africa experienced great influx of African immigrants who worked in mines and farms under harsh and exploitative conditions before and after the institutionalization of apartheid. Although these labour migrants contributed a great deal to the economic development of South Africa, they were not given citizenship status. The formal democratization in 1994 came with dreams and expectations of a more inclusive South Africa, where black South Africans hoped to maximize their potential in a more free, fair and equal society. In the same vein, it also opened spaces for an influx of especially African immigrants into the country which set the stage for a new form of contest for belonging between South African citizens and African migrant settlers. One major manifestation of this contest was the violent xenophobic attacks against African immigrants which predate that of May 2008 and has continued with lower intensity across the country since then. While it is doubtless possible to find abundant evidence of antagonism in the relations between South Africans and African immigrants, the purpose of this study is to investigate the everyday realities of migrants in ordinary places who interact with a variety of people through their livelihood activities, marriages and social relationships, moving around towns and cities, in their residential areas, in faith-based organizations and other elements of everyday life. Rather than assuming all relations are hostile, this study intends to look at the breadth of everyday relationships within a specific context. Based on the foregoing, the main task of this study is to holistically examine and explain the nature of interactions between African migrants and South African citizens by analysing the social network ties that connect them in the specific case of Umhlathuze municipality. It will also investigate the variety of networks that exists between African migrants and South Africans and examine the nature of the linkages in the various networks identified between these two groups in Umhlathuze Municipality. Apart from a review of relevant literature, policies and other official documents, this paper will employ a purposive sample survey and in-depth interview of African immigrants and South Africans within their networks in selected suburbs in KwaZulu-Natal.

Keywords : migration, networks, development, host communities

Conference Title : ICIMHS 2014 : International Conference on International Migration and Human Security

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : July 30-31, 2014