a concept in the way in which it has been deployed here to hold these very differently located struggles around land and history together. Readers hoping for greater clarity on the way forward in dealing with difficult histories of land dispossession and marginalization in the contemporary world are likely to find the collection disappointing in this respect. The editors themselves appear beguiled by the endless reworkings of ‘property and citizenship in contexts of political transformation’ (p. 19) that can be observed across the case studies, seeking out not so much the (always temporal) resolution of the actual political conflicts and struggles at hand as the analytical unravelling of the many strands that shape them. Individual chapters may well be of use to policy-makers in the respective countries, but the book as a whole is unlikely to have such appeal. In the end, the primary focus of the book is on restitution as a field of academic study – a ‘fruitful terrain for scholars’ as the editors note (p. 19) – rather than restitution (and land reform) as a field of political and policy engagement.

TONY WEIS


This two-volume collection comes with hefty praise. Cristobal Kay calls Volume 1 ‘the most comprehensive and thorough critique of the neoliberal land policies ever published’, and James Putzel describes Volume 2 as ‘an important theoretical and methodological standard for all subsequent studies of [land] reform in the Philippines and elsewhere’. The two volumes also won the Philippine 28th National Book Awards in the social science category. Such acclamation is well deserved, as these collections bring together much of Borras’ immense contribution on these subjects over the past decade. They also reflect a very admirable combination of intensive scholarship and grounded activism, as he seeks to improve both research and strategic action on land reform.

Most of the 13 substantive chapters have been previously published as journal articles since 2001, including two in this Journal, and while Borras has attempted to rework these to read more like a monograph, he concedes that the final product lies somewhere in between a monograph and a collection, as well as overlapping with Pro-Poor Land Reform: A Critique (Borras 2007). So there is some inevitable repetition, which could probably have been thinned out a bit further in places and integrated better in others, but in general the collection is more than a sum of its parts; that is, while the chapters obviously stand alone, having been articles, they also gain strength read together.

In Volume 1: International Perspective, Borras establishes the historical context of land reform policy and practice on a global scale, critically engages theoretical debates in building a conceptual framework for analysing land reforms, examines market-led approaches to land reform in theory and practice, and highlights the rise of transnational peasant activism. In Volume 2: Philippine Perspective, he analyses the land reform process there in detail, which represents a fascinating and important case given the range of approaches to land reform (both state-led and market-led), the policy backdrop (intensive structural adjustment and trade liberalization) and the considerable scale and range of outcomes. The volumes thus

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broadly move from a macro- and more theoretical lens to a national and more empirical one, though the structure is blurrier than this; the Philippine experience with land reform is an integral part of Volume 1 (with chapters two and five focused specifically on the Philippines and other examples used elsewhere), while an important part of Volume 2 is a theorization of state–society interactions. The net result is both a compelling argument for why land reform processes and outcomes need to be carefully unpacked, with attention to some oft-neglected considerations, and an exemplary model of how such a detailed accounting looks – contributions that can be seen more clearly in light of each other. This discussion will, however, focus more on Volume 1, since Volume 2 overlaps more heavily with Pro-Poor Land Reform: A Critique, the subject of an excellent review in this Journal (Deere 2009).

Volume 1 covers a tremendous amount of ground, with densely layered arguments braced by a mountainous literature review. One of its principal objectives is to challenge conventional assumptions about land reform which, Borras argues, have produced ‘incomplete or flawed conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches’ and led to an ‘incorrect accounting and analysis of the nature, scope, pace, and direction of change/reform that have or have not occurred in a given agrarian structure’ (pp. 18–19). He sees this ‘accounting problem’ to stem, in significant measure, from an overly narrow focus on the transfer of private property rights. A key implication of this is the tendency to downplay or ignore the significance of the social relations on public/forest lands, and the extent to which redistributive gains can be achieved there. Another implication is the inconsistent treatment of share tenancy or leasehold reforms, which Borras insists can have significant redistributive content, complement other reforms, or alternatively have regressive outcomes, and hence need to be approached carefully. Finally, overemphasizing the transfer of private property rights can lead to overestimations of the scale of redistribution, obscuring intra-class sales and deceptive transactions which do not bring real gains for the poor.

The incorrect accounting of land reform at sub-national or national scales – ‘at best, partial, or worse, flawed’ (p. 28) – greatly limits the effectiveness of comparative analysis, which is so critical to evaluating land reform outcomes and their development implications. Mistaken conclusions can in turn permeate reporting, planning and policy debates, as well as adversely limiting the scope of struggle, obscuring different means through which the landless and land-poor can make gains. Out of this rigorous critique, Borras builds a more comprehensive conceptual framework for analysing (and hence comparing) land reform initiatives, both within and between countries. This framework implores future research to:

- start from a detailed examination of the complexities of power and rural class differentiation, which includes but is broader than the structure of landholding (e.g. how are productive decisions made? how is surplus value controlled?);
- go beyond a focus on the transfer of private property, and interrogate the productive relations on public/forest lands and tenancy conditions (e.g. what was happening on public land before and after a given programme? has the share of surplus within the terms of tenancy changed, and if so, in what direction?);
- assess and disaggregate the policy frameworks for acquiring and distributing land (if these are multiple), using this as a basis for considering outcomes;
- examine the relative class positioning of ‘participants’ in a given programme (as expropriated landowners and recipients, sellers and buyers, or some combination), who is being excluded (from successful commercial farms to the landless), and how landowners are compensated and recipients charged vis-à-vis market prices (while considering the matter of market prices with due caution);
- scrutinize official statistics on private land redistribution, giving careful attention to the extent that they have had non-redistributive outcomes (e.g. transferred land within rural
classes; provided ‘paper’ gains for the poor without enhancing their effective control over surpluses);

- explore the interactions between rural social movements and their allies (e.g. progressive NGOs) and the state (e.g. is there a dialogue? is it marked by tension, distrust, civil disobedience or repression?), and how these have affected the nature of land reforms;
- consider how programmes (e.g. credit, extension) and policies (e.g. liberalization) that have followed land reforms (or been absent from them) have contributed to subsequent successes or failures; and, finally, to
- employ multiple methods, including extensive fieldwork and interviewing on the ground.

My only concern here echoes a point made by Deere (2009): the role of gender in rural inequality, agrarian social relations, and in uneven land reform processes is given little treatment, theoretically or empirically. Thus, as it will doubtless inform future research on land reform, Borras’ framework would be enhanced by systematic attention to gender relations.

Still, this is a very big step forward for analysis, as Putzel suggests, and provides a basis for more useful comparisons, which can then be directed at contemporary debates over the theory and practice of land reform. The debate with which Borras is centrally concerned is that between state-led agrarian reform (SLAR) and market-led agrarian reform (MLAR), and what the ascendance of the latter entails. Though momentum for land reform was widely derailed by the 1980s, most still assumed that the state needed to have a strong role facilitating redistributive land reform. But by the 1990s, as various struggles were re-railing land reform as a foundational issue in rural development, influential economists at the World Bank and elsewhere were arguing that decentralized market approaches could facilitate better redistributive outcomes than coercive or expropriatory ones.

Volume 1 provides an extensive critique of MLAR in theory and practice, drawing attention to how it was built upon caricatures of SLAR (there are strong parallels here to how structural adjustment programmes were built upon sweeping criticisms of import-substitution industrialization). Borras argues that MLAR advocates establish a facile binary of success and failure, and then use a broad-brush – with little empirical evidence – to create a picture of widespread failure with SLARs. In contrast to this ‘very partial accounting’ (p. 78), he makes it clear that SLARs have a much more complex track record filled with partial gains and losses, but with overall positive outcomes for small farmers and rural development where they have been seriously pursued. MLAR advocates have also attacked SLARs on the grounds that they are too confrontational and politically contentious while creating a dependent, dole-out mentality for recipients, and then invert this unhappy image of angry landlords and many unfit recipients with a rosy one of voluntarism (economically enticed landlords), ‘proper beneficiary targeting’ (to commercially oriented farmers) and productivity gains.

The alleged need to better target beneficiaries is also tied to the claim by MLAR advocates that effective land reform requires farm plans before redistribution (‘proper sequencing’), whereas SLARs have tended to redistribute first, plan second. Borras demonstrates how these criticisms of state-led approaches and claims for market-led ones are made without much evidence, and that it is utterly implausible to think that politically non-contentious reforms aimed at the most economically ‘fit’ recipients are going to bring real gains for the poor. Further, where the sequencing of farm plans before purchase has been prioritized, this has tended to make redistribution more exclusionary.

Another criticism of SLARs that Borras confronts is the claim that they ‘distort’ land markets. This rests on some dubious assumptions, a basic one being that land can be reduced to a purely economic value, ignoring (among other things) how landlords derive power and
prestige from land beyond its market price, and how they are unlikely to voluntarily reduce this. The image of a 'distorted' market also assumes some sort of neutral baseline that land redistribution can start from, with distortions framed as a technical economic problem (artificial interventions in current market prices) that exist in a moral, ahistorical vacuum and bear no relation to how unequal property regimes were established.

MLAR advocates also criticize SLARs as being costly and saddled with patronage, with decentralized market-based reforms posed as a double-edge fix – at once reducing the economic burden of land reform on the state and making land redistribution more transparent. Again, Borras reveals the thin evidence marshalled behind such claims, and shows that MLARs have in practice been neither cheap nor transparent relative to their limited scale, while the appeal to cost reductions fits in well with the forced austerity of structural adjustment. He argues that contrary to what is asserted, decentralizing mechanisms for land redistribution can actually exacerbate inequalities, as the power of landlords and informational imbalances are often greatest at the local level.

In sum, Volume 1 demolishes the case for MLAR made by its leading advocates and shows its real essence: an ideological pretext for 'modernizing' agriculture in which some recipients of varying sizes can grow while most of the land poor vanish from policy imperatives. As well as Borras accomplishes this, his critique might have been pushed even further by problematizing the matter of ‘fitness’ in MLAR advocacy in environmental as well as class terms. For instance, he could have drawn attention to how fossil energy, external inputs and a host of environmental externalities subsidize the idealized model of efficient farming, and how a failure to resolve land inequalities on the best agricultural land is also related to pressures on forest frontiers. But this point should not detract from Borras’ compelling critique, which ultimately points to the fact that there is no substitute for coercion, expropriation, compensation below market values and an active state, pushed and supported by civil society, if land reform is to benefit the rural poor.

Borras’ detailed accounting of the Philippine land reform process in Volume 2 draws on his long experience an activist, researcher and advisor there. To unpack and compare the outcomes of various land reform approaches in the Philippines, Borras has poured over heaps of policy documents and official data, had access to key contacts in peasant movements, NGOs and in government, and conducted extensive fieldwork with farmers. What emerges is a complex picture, but at the same time many of his principal arguments from Volume 1 become clear: land reform outcomes cannot be analysed on a binary of success/failure, but are a matter of degree; the social relations on, and distribution of, public land must be taken seriously; leasehold reform can under some conditions benefit the poor; and state-led approaches are invariably more redistributive towards the poor than market-led approaches.

On one hand, he shows that significant redistribution has occurred over the past two decades, in often underappreciated ways, such as through transfers of public or forest lands previously controlled by elites and through improved tenancy conditions. On the other hand, he shows how the government has exaggerated achievements, revealing such problems as fraudulent transactions manipulated by landlords, intra-class transfers and the lack of necessary supporting policies (including the damaging impact of trade liberalization). To make sense of how gains have been made in a period where debt and structural adjustment have loomed heavily over policy-making, Borras argues that there is a need to focus on state–society interactions, rather than seeing the essential driving force for land reform coming from either above or below. While state intervention is inescapable to make land

1 Borras estimates that three million poor households (constituting roughly two-fifths of the agricultural population) have benefitted from land distribution, and a million more have benefitted from leasehold reform, considerably more than most peasant activists would have initially anticipated.
reform work for the poor, he argues that its autonomy and ability to confront elites should not be exaggerated, especially without a strong and organized social base actively pushing it. At the same time, overemphasizing structural barriers within the state can obscure avenues to incremental but significant gains, even during seemingly unfavourable political climates. A nuanced approach to state–society interactions helps discern the land reform achievements in the Philippines, as peasant movements (sometimes supported by progressive NGOs) learned to constructively engage with the state while reformist elements within an improved bureaucracy began to better interact with peasant movements.

The rich detail in discussing how redistributive gains have been won (particularly in ways not typically given much attention), how some official achievements have been illusory or even regressive, and how peasant movements have approached their struggles for land, all help to put Borras’ conceptual framework into sharper focus, and show us a very high analytical standard indeed. And as suggested at the outset, this standard will inform and challenge both scholars and activists.

REFERENCES


GEERT DE NEVE


India’s Unfree Workforce is a welcome addition to a growing body of literature that seeks to understand the spread, nature and consequences of different forms of unfree labour in contemporary India. Consisting of an Introduction and 14 chapters, the volume brings together a remarkable wealth of empirical data that forms the basis for a critical analysis of unfree labour on the subcontinent. Much of the analysis seeks to enhance our understanding of the similarities and differences between what the authors term ‘old’ and ‘new’ forms of bondage, or of what Breman has earlier termed ‘neo-bondage’. Analysis also focuses on the diversity and range of unfree labour ties in India, on the social and cultural contexts within which unfree labour emerges, and on the links between capitalism, development and unfreedom. Several of the chapters address the issue of ‘what can be done?’, but here answers unavoidably remain indicative rather than conclusive. While the questions addressed in this volume are in themselves not new, the empirical evidence presented does provide novel insights into a conceptually complex, politically sensitive and morally disturbing socio-economic phenomenon. Let me say a few words about each chapter in turn.

In the Introduction, Breman and Guérin set out what they rightly conceive of as major differences between older forms of bondage (or agrarian servitude) and contemporary forms of unfreedom in India. While unfree labour used to be ‘embedded in an arrangement of mutual interdependence and took place in a whole set of rights and obligations between the patrons and their clients’ (p. 2), contemporary bondage is more time-bound, economic rather than social in nature, deprived of the minimal protection that patronage offered, increasingly