

R.P. Werbner, (Ed.) *Land Reform in the Making: Tradition, Public Policy and Ideology in Botswana*, Rex Collings, London, pp. XV + 162

The issues of land tenure and land reform are perhaps the central issues in African political economy today. It is the land tenure systems in African countries which simultaneously represent and reinforce the nature of society. In South Africa, land tenure reflects the apartheid structure and its colonial roots; the same holds true for Namibia. The problem of unequal land holdings based on colour is at the center of a continuing political debate in Zimbabwe. In Tanzania, attempts to change the land tenure structure through the *ujamaa vijijini* policy were successfully resisted in some areas where class formation was the most advanced, such as in the north-central section of the country. In Kenya, agreed-upon land tenure arrangements between the emergent Kenyan elite and the departing colonial administration ensured continued inequality in landholdings.

The experience of Botswana in the area of land reform is no less controversial as any of those just mentioned; the implications of its land reform policies are if anything more dramatic. It is to their credit that the authors in Werbner's book have approached this subject with detailed, reasoned analysis. Careful editing ensured, to varied degrees, that all the studies would conform to a framework set by Werbner, a framework with four basic components which determine land tenure policy: colonial policies, ideology, the evolution of social classes, and post-colonial government actions.

In reading the book, one is immediately struck by the extent to which different social formations exist within Botswana regarding the question of land. The book uses a two-sided approach to the study of land tenure in Botswana. first examining overall government public policy toward land tenure arrangements, and second looking at land tenure patterns among the smaller ethnic groups in the country. The former is well represented by Hitchcock's work on the Kalahari region of Central District and by Roberts' work on the Kgatleng, while the

latter is represented by Almagor on the Mbanderu, Sutherland on the Yeyi, and most especially by Comaroff on the Barolong.

Werbner's introductory chapter sets the tone for the chapters which follow. The primary concern is how a 'nation's' ideology is constructed and changed by interested parties, whether this be based on class or ethnicity, whether by present-day government actions or the vestiges of colonial government policies. For example, Werbner argues with special reference to the centerpiece of land reform in independent Botswana, the Tribal Grazing Land Policy, that was designed by powerful interested parties to be viewed as 'progressive' and 'efficient' by the public through an appeal to Tswana principles of equity, conservation, and social justice. At the same time, it was viewed by technocrats and planners as more efficient, productive, and less ecologically damaging than traditional land tenure arrangements (the latter of which was looked upon with particular distain). As Werbner sums up (p 1) :

In terms of more broad theoretical aims, our attempt is to link the study of state-intervention to what are problems of ethnicity class conflict, and centre-periphery relations in a new nation. Running through our separate views is the shared assumption that the interpretation of political ideology is a necessary basis for the analysis of land tenure. What is essential, in other words, is an understanding of the publicly persuasive use of authoritative concepts for the purpose of rendering meaningful and justifying both change, and reluctance to change. Hence we show how ideology is culturally constructed or reconstructed.....by different ethnic groups, by members of antagonistic classes, and by officials and their clients.

The Chapter by Hitchcock provides an exhaustive historical account of land tenure changes in Botswana during and after the colonial period, discussing the relationship between political expansion, social stratification and land tenure. Hitchcock examines how the evolving traditional structure of land tenure affected, and was affected by,

the implementation of central government policies in the area of land reform, and how a national ideology was employed to justify, and give credibility to, the emerging policy. This was accomplished by the employment of a series of negative stereotypes regarding traditional land tenure coupled with invalid assumptions about existing land uses. As Hitchcock concludes (p 28) :

By attacking traditional institutions as being static and unstructured, policy makers in Botswana have tried to justify the introduction of new kinds of social and economic arrangements. The fact that many of the original assumptions upon which the arguments for change were based have turned out to be incorrect has not resulted in an abandonment of the programme. In a sense, the Grazing Policy can be seen as a means for the political elite to expand its authority.

While Hitchcock emphasises the uses of ideology to direct social change, in this case land tenure changes under the Tribal Grazing Land Policy in Central District, Roberts places emphasis on the fact that public policy can be, and indeed often is, a result of emergent social changes, rather than acting as a change agent itself. Roberts examines tenure changes in the Kgatleng district which took place beginning in the socially turbulent 1940s up to the Tribal Land Act of the late 1960s. Discussion first focuses on the 'privatisation' of interests via direct allotments of land by the Chief and the Land Granting Committee to individuals without ward authority involvement, and the rise of less restrictive individual-to-individual transfer procedures. He then draws parallels between this system of land tenure and that instituted through the Tribal Land Act. In doing so, Roberts illustrates how a political ideology which is used to induce change can have its roots in pre-existing social formation. This can be contrasted with the employment of 'traditional' Batswana principles for the purposes of rapid social change, as was the case in Hitchcock's study.

Almagorand Sutherland each provide a discussion of one of two ethnic groups generally neglected in the literature on Botswana, the Mbanderu

of the LaKe Ngami area and the Yeyi of north-central Ngamiland, respectively. The strength of the two studies is based not only in the detail to which they examine the ethnic groups of interest, but also in the larger implications of their studies for issues fundamental to other societies. Both discussions illustrate how existing social formations affect attempts at change introduced from outside. Almagor argues for the critique of the pastoral society of the Mbanderu based, not on economic criteria removed from social reality, but rather based on a larger, wholistic rationality. When policy makers do not account for these factors the induced change is often inappropriate and, justifiably, rejected. Sutherland's study goes beyond a case study of the Yeyi through a discussion of the minimal role local level institutions play in what is often a one-directional policy planning and implementation process. The result is often (and was in this case) local level circumvention of the process.

While both the Almagor and Sutherland chapters have useful implications for policymakers, the chapter by Comaroff is perhaps the most important case study offered in the Werbner book, in large part because the Barolong Farms represent the type of farming 'success story' most central government policymakers desire with regard to arable agriculture. Indeed, the accomplishments of the Barolong farmers is impressive. Since independence, the Barolongs have increased their arable output by over 1,750%. Comaroff argues that this is due to some farmers in the Barolong area 'seizing the change' by 1) taking advantage of cheap state loans, 2) the existence of favourable rainfall over a few years, 3) relatively easy access to markets, 4) cheap labour which could be paid just enough to discourage migration from the area, 5) sharecropping arrangements, and 6) the rapid consolidation of landholdings to fewer owners. Comaroff argues that these social changes came about because the 'internal logic' of the Barolong social order was right for the changes which took place, reflected both in the decentralised independent household structure and pragmatic individualism existent in the society. Yet the author details the tremendous social costs involved in the transformation of the Barolong over the past twenty years. Increasing polarisation between rich and poor farmers, coupled with a squeezed middle cadre and a burgeoning landless class, has

heightened the conflict between the emergent social classes. The result has been the virtual elimination of upward-moving middle farmers, with most falling into the rank of poor farmers or (even worse) landless labourers. The Tribal Land Act forced further polarisation, aided by a 'captured' land board. The social costs of such rapid agricultural advancement may simply be too high a price to pay, and for this reason alone the experience of the Barolong will be of interest both to policymakers and academics.

A case study by Werbner in North East district illustrates how land reform has emerged as an area of testing of centre-periphery relations, that is, relations between local level citizens and officials and the central government. Werbner details how the centre intrudes into the periphery, and how the periphery 'receives' something always variant from what was 'sent'.

A final chapter by R. Silitshena details how Batswana have been excluded from retail trade by licensing requirements which favour already established (Asian and European) trading classes. The reasons for the inclusion of this study in this book are not clear (outside of the administrative connection between licensing authorities and land granting authorities), and as a result the work does not fit in with the previous chapters; the paper will hopefully stand alone as an article to ensure further consideration.

It is the strength of Werbner's book that when reading it one can easily draw a multitude of parallels and discontinuities with land tenure structures and tenure changes in other African countries (both independent and otherwise). It is a pity that many potential buyers may turn away thinking that it is of interest only to scholars studying Botswana. While a case study of Botswana per sé does not necessarily have generalisability to other social systems in other countries in Africa, the framework Werbner provides can be used by researchers in their own studies, whether case or cross-national. One hopes that Werbner will extend his theoretical framework to a more general

approach to land reform on the continent. In sum, the book is well-written, especially well-edited, and is recommended without hesitation.

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