

## LAND, POLICY AND CHANGE

A Review of C R Cross and R J Haines (eds) *Towards Freehold? Option for Land and Development in South Africa's Black Rural Areas* (Johannesburg: Juta, 1988)

Anne Vaughan

The objectives of this book are clearly stated in the Introduction. They are to show how government intervention and economic forces have impacted on the land systems of the black rural areas, and to indicate, in the light of this, what the possibilities for the future might be. The intention is to highlight the latter, for it is asserted that, 'The pivotal issue is the future land economy' (p 1). A further aim is also specified. This is to provide coverage of as full a range of approaches to the land question as possible (p 29).

Considered in terms of these objectives, the book is somewhat disappointing. It will be argued here that the way in which the project has been conceived and defined militates against the achievement of all the goals that are set out in the Introduction. While much of the material in the book does elucidate the effect on black rural areas of state policies and economic factors, thus throwing light on aspects of the current state of the land systems, it is far less successful in identifying influences and pressures which are likely to impinge strongly on the future of the land economy.

The title is the first indicator of the problems of conception and definition. A twin focus is emphasised - South Africa's black rural areas and freehold tenure. Two related points can be made about this focus.

First, the spatial delimitation, which restricts the focus to the black rural areas, has unfortunate repercussions for any attempt to weigh up the future of the land question - in terms of either possibilities or probabilities, although the consequences for trying to think about the latter are the more serious. This is because attempted resolutions of land issues are likely to be played out in national and regional contexts which, both geographically and politically, overlay and encapsulate those areas specified here. The spatial focus which the book specifies is historically derived. The black rural areas upon which the spotlight falls are a creation of the economics and politics of apartheid. So the book tells us quite a lot about some of the effects of those economics and politics. However, these parameters have been superseded in some significant ways by the reformist trajectory of state policies during the 1980s. Also, they are parameters which have been consistently opposed in popular struggles against the imposition of apartheid policies. A strong imperative in any post-apartheid dispensation - especially one in which the groundswell of opposition has room for expression - would be to transcend those parameters. The book is thus rooted in a spatial logic which has, to some degree, been marginalised.

Secondly, freehold, the introduction of which is initially posed as a crucial developmental issue for the areas under scrutiny, turns out, in the book, to be a side issue. Many of the contributors think that its introduction will not in itself regenerate the economically debilitated black rural areas. Bromberger, for

example, points out that its introduction will guarantee neither development nor the emergence of a market in land, so that efforts to develop black rural areas should not wait upon its advent. However, freehold turns out to be a secondary question only because the majority of the contributors share the blinkered viewpoint implied in the title's spatial delimitation. Recognition of precisely where the pressures for the introduction of freehold might actually come from is prohibited by this spatial delimitation.

I shall now attempt to give substance to the contention that the manner in which the project is defined spatially, undermines realization of one central task which the editors have set themselves. The most obvious problem with the spatial focus specified (which accurately reflects the spatial and political perceptions of the bulk of the contributors) is that it poses the land question in such a way as to sidestep the issue of a national redistribution of land. It has been pointed out (and with specific reference to the debate on land tenure from the journal *Reality* included in this volume) that reform which is conceived of and implemented within the confines of the present land distribution is unlikely to have much impact on the crisis conditions which currently characterize many rural areas (Derman and Poultney, 1987:561). Arguing within the paradigm of underdevelopment theory, Derman and Poultney rightly contend that debates which accept the status quo as given, will fail to confront questions of rural development in a meaningful way. This is because they cannot perceive, and therefore they cannot challenge, the structural roots of rural poverty. The spatial delimitation which characterizes the *Reality* debate gives a particular narrowly defined meaning to land reform. Tenurial forms are at issue, as may be other aspects of 'development' such as the provision of credit or of infrastructure. Land redistribution is not.

The question of land redistribution in the national context is not ignored elsewhere in the book. Contributors who do take up the issue are Zulu and Mashile. They identify the utterly inadequate land resources left to blacks as the prime cause of the ecological degradation, the desperate poverty, and the underdevelopment which now characterize the black rural areas. Neither of these pieces is problem free. Zulu's polemic hones in on the iniquitous legislation in terms of which blacks were relegated to such a disproportionately small percentage of South Africa's land. This legislation is seen as almost synonymous with dispossession and subordination rather than as a formalisation of what were complex and contradictory processes, which included policies to preserve black access to limited areas of land. Mashile fails to demonstrate the link between low productivity and the pattern of land allocation.

The question of land redistribution is taken up in a rather less polemical way in two other articles, both of which have already had a fair amount of exposure, and both of which partake of the immediate and strong anticipation of post-apartheid possibilities which characterized the period from 1984-86. Cobbett considers the likely demand for land redistribution in a post-apartheid setting and Mabin (whose paper is unaccountably included by the editors in a section of the book dealing with state intervention) realistically and sensitively explores the possibilities for future land reform in the Transvaal.

Overall, however, the issue of land redistribution tends to be submerged in the

book. Most of the contributions consider the question of rural development within the parameters of the present land distribution - or at least without challenging explicitly the political legitimacy of these parameters. In the second section of the book, which focusses more closely on future options and possibilities, the issue of redistribution is not raised at all. This seems somewhat anomalous in the light of the point that Cross makes in her Introduction. She suggests that it is 'the bitter fact of the Land Acts themselves' rather than the question of freehold, which is likely to be the key issue for 'informed blacks' (p 34).

The spatial focus is a difficulty not only because it tends to marginalise the issue of land redistribution but because it inhibits assessment of broader policies and processes which will affect, and indeed have already affected, the question of tenure forms in rural areas. This can be illustrated with reference to the development initiatives now being taken by the Development Bank of Southern Africa. These initiatives are not taken into account in this book. Although it contains articles by DBSA researchers, DBSA aims and policies are nowhere explicitly addressed and discussed. It is worth spelling out briefly the reform context of DBSA involvement and the spatial logic which underpins that involvement, since this makes plain why the spatial delimitation is the inhibiting factor that it is.

In their critical assessment of the state's reform strategies in the 1980s Cobbett et al (1986) describe the regional development plan, first outlined by P W Botha in 1981, which delineated eight development regions. This implied a new spatial logic for development strategies in Southern Africa which transcended the political boundaries established in the course of the construction of grand apartheid. Cobbett et al note that an important aspect of regional development planning was the establishment of the DBSA and of Regional Development Advisory Committees, to pinpoint development needs and priorities and to co-ordinate development initiatives. The DBSA, which is modelled on the World Bank, is a non-state, multilateral body which has enormous financial power. It is undoubtedly becoming a significant force in determining the direction of economic and political policies. It is conceived of as a non-political organization - 'DBSA is not involved in politics or in policy-making, but in the practical aspects of development.' (Van Der Kooy, 1984:4) - which is hardly surprising since its establishment was in part intended to depoliticize the process of development.

That the question of land tenure is important in the context of development financing undertaken by the DBSA is reflected in the comprehensive research report on this theme produced by the DBSA in 1986 (Vink, 1986). In this report the implications for the DBSA of various forms of tenure are discussed and the directions which DBSA interventions should take are spelled out. What is stressed is that access to land and security of tenure are important to development strategy. Allocation of land to the most productive users and uses is seen as the key to achieving development goals. Clearly, freehold is the tenurial form which best suits the development objectives of the DBSA, and this is the form that it propagates. The introduction of freehold, it is suggested, would also facilitate private sector investment. Although it is recognized that immediate privatization

of tenure on tribally occupied land would be extremely socially disruptive, the emphasis in the report, for all categories of land, is on the necessity for social adjustment and tenurial reform, with a view to achieving, eventually, a uniformity in the form of tenure. Part of the state's reform initiative is, after all, the re-incorporation of the homelands in the wider economy, although this doesn't imply the dissolution of their political identities.

The general manager of the DBSA recently emphasized that the Bank was specifically oriented to the mobilization of private sector resources for use in the developing areas of the subcontinent. The DBSA which 'favours grassroots, smallscale and community-oriented approaches' (La Grange, 1989:3) consciously attempts to involve the private sector in development initiatives. Progress has been made, he asserts, with regard to the formulation of guidelines for rural development policies. 'In virtually all rural areas, agriculture based on the emergence of individual local farmers is potentially the most important sector to establish an economic base' (1989:5). This general stress on the mobilization of private sector resources, and on the fostering of a class of independent small farmers, underscores the importance for the DBSA of encouraging the tenurial form which is consonant with such approaches.

In her introductory overview, Cross puts across some convincing and thought-provoking arguments on the question of tenurial forms. Her position is that indigenous forms of tenure are adaptive and flexible. Given the way in which a *de facto* market in land and land leasing have developed in the context of traditional forms of tenure, the introduction of freehold does not seem to be as central to development as is often contended. Nor is traditional tenure as conservative, as resistant to change, such a stumbling block to the improvement of productivity in black rural areas, as is often implied. Furthermore, there are other priorities if the intention is the development of black rural areas to provide income and security for a fairly broadly based rural population. A strengthening of local economies through the provision of infrastructure, the incentive of attractive producer prices and the securing of stable guaranteed markets would do a great deal more for development than the introduction of freehold, which in itself may have little or no effect. All of this might be valid. But the perhaps more conventional view that tribal forms of tenure are an obstacle to development, and that formalised security will broaden the base for development financing, has in the DBSA the support of a powerful financial institution, which is in a position to influence the outcome of the tenure debate in most of what constitutes the black rural areas.

What I have been contending is that insufficient cognizance is taken, on the one hand, of the popular issue of land redistribution and, on the other, of reformist development policies which are likely to influence how land is held in the areas on which the book focusses. Interestingly, the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly has recently passed a new land bill which allows for a switch to freehold. This may well precipitate tension between tribal authorities whose power base is likely to be undermined, and those with entrepreneurial interests who would wish to expand their landholdings. The dispossession by market forces which some of the contributors in the book warn against, is likely to set in. What effects will the emergence of a market in land have on the processes of class differentiation

and capital accumulation? What will be the implications of the move towards freehold for the viability of the tribal authority systems? These are the kinds of questions which need to be foregrounded if the real possibilities for the future of the land economy are to be understood. The *Reality* debate, instead of raising such issues, takes off with an article which proposes a system of leasehold in terms of which the tribe, in which ownership rights would be vested, would lease out land to those with an interest in using it. The difficulties with the proposition are ably demonstrated by some of the respondents, notably Cross and De Wet. But the debate centres on ideas and models which seem to have little reverberation in the realm of policy formulation, or at the level of popular demand.

The absence of a sufficiently sharp sense in the book of the forces likely to impinge on land issues is evidenced also by the articles chosen to set up the basic polarisation of views, the 'background of contemporary policy positions' (p 30), which provide a context for the remaining articles. The articles which serve this purpose are by G van der Wall, who writes in his capacity as Director-General of the Department of Development Aid, and P Zulu, a social scientist who takes as his touchstone the broad principles encapsulated in the Freedom Charter. These pieces articulate important perspectives. The fundamental issues raised by Zulu have already been commented on. Van der Wall's contribution is useful because it indicates clearly how policy decisions on land issues exclude any consideration of the interests and views of the communities who are settled on the land in question. Ownership rights to Trust Land situated in the national states are being transferred to the governments of those states. This followed a process of negotiation and discussion between the DDA and the relevant national state government. That there has been substantial resistance to these moves from the communities which are to be thus incorporated is not even commented upon.

The problem involved in using Zulu and Van der Wall as representatives of polarized views is not that they are uninteresting or insignificant. It is that this polarization omits important actors or potential actors in the arena of rural development. The failure in the book to identify significant political dynamics which will impinge on the future of the land economy is perhaps symptomatic of a generalised tendency on the part of the editors to depoliticise issues of land reform and rural development. This tendency is evident in the introductory overview as well as in the way in which material has been selected and edited. Two examples must suffice.

The abstraction of the developmental experiences of other countries from their political contexts in the comparative part of the introductory overview is an aspect of what is being referred to. In the discussion of successful land reform initiatives that have been carried out in South Korea, for instance, Cross notes that 'a massive land redistribution to achieve justice in terms of access to land, together with ceilings on ownership to control the re-emergence of 'disqualifying tendencies' (p 15) has, in the context of a market-driven economy, dramatically increased peasant production. The case of post-independence India springs immediately to mind. Indian land reform measures, including the introduction of a land ceiling, were successfully subverted by the larger landlords. Problems of landlessness and rural poverty remained endemic (Joshi, 1974a and 1974b). A similar set of measures to those applied in South Korea failed dismally. The

point is that other experiences need to be contextualized politically and culturally if any really useful lessons are to be derived from them. The existing social relations on the land and the relative strength of rural interests at the level of national politics will, for instance, impinge vitally on land reform measures, which ought to be assessed in that context.

A brief account of part of the Catholic Church survey of its land holdings conducted in 1986 appears as an appendix to the article on the landlord-tenant question on black freehold land. What is included is an overview of that part of the Church report dealing with the quality of life of tenants living on Church lands. However, there is only a passing reference to the radical proposals which the report contains to use Church lands as a base for rural transformation. A distinction is made in the report between those policies which would maintain the status quo, such as the leasing of Church land to white farmers, and actions which would challenge it, such as making Church land available to black farmers and worker co-operatives like the Sarmcol Workers Co-operative. Founded on the principles of attempting to overcome the divide between white and black land, of empowering the rural poor through initiating democratic forms of organization, and of restructuring production relations, the initiatives envisaged include restructuring of patterns of ownership and control on church farms and facilitating the organization of farm workers on adjacent white farms. It is a pity that those parts of the Church report which so explicitly deal with future transformative possibilities for the utilization of Church lands were not included in the book. Such a contribution would have been particularly illuminating and useful in conjunction with Eleanor Preston-Whyte's analysis of the conflicting interests which have emerged over the use of the Indaleni Mission land.

Finally, some comment on the skills of the editors is called for. A serious weakness of presentation is the totally inadequate and inaccurate list of references at the end of the book. Many references given in the text (name of author and date of publication only are provided in brackets) do not appear in the list of references at the back of the book at all. In some instances, the dates of publication provided in brackets in the text do not correspond with the dates provided in the list of references, creating an element of doubt as to whether the full reference *is* in fact the one which is referred to in the text. That the list of references is so incomplete, so ad hoc, and so wrong, is the more unfortunate given the stated aim of the editors in bringing together this collection of articles, which is to provide a kind of compendium of approaches to the land question. If the purpose is to be fully representative rather than comprehensive in any one perspective or sphere of the land question, then it is to be expected that readers will wish to follow through on specific aspects - and the reference list is guaranteed to frustrate.

This review has focussed, somewhat ungenerously perhaps, on the gaps in terms of what light is cast upon the future of the land economy. The book also contains serious and subtle analyses which highlight the appalling impact on rural areas of state policy is not in question. That it adequately tracks the forces

for change in the country's agrarian relations is.

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The Gender Research Group at the University of Natal is organising a conference in February 1991 on

#### WOMEN AND GENDER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

This will be followed by a one-day workshop on 'Teaching Women's Studies in South Africa'.

The aim of the conference is to bring together all those interested in analysing the position of women in Southern Africa - researchers, teachers, students and organisers. We hope to:

- encourage new research
- provide a forum for debate
- advance our understanding of the dynamics of gender relations, more particularly as these effect women, and their significance in shaping our society and women's experience of it.

It is being planned as an inter-disciplinary event and we invite papers with a bearing on our very broad theme from all interested people.

The workshop is envisaged as an opportunity for those engaged in teaching in the area of women's studies at a tertiary level to meet and discuss curricula, funding, standing within the university, and other issues confronting us in this work.

If you would like to be kept informed about either or both events, and have any suggestions or comments about them, please contact the GRG, c/o Sociology Department, University of Natal, King George V Avenue, Durban 4001.