

NOTE

1. Indeed, Marx regarded Petty rather than A. Smith as the true founder of political economy as a whole.

Borras, Saturnino Jr. M. *Pro-Poor Land Reform: A Critique*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007. 411 pp.

Land reform is an issue that has recurred throughout human history: one that has often shown the power to make or unmake nation-states and one that has repeatedly sparked uprisings of various types—including national revolutions.

By and large, the concept of land reform refers to the transfer of ownership from a small number of people with extensive land estates to those who till the land, whether individually or collectively. Land reform may take place with or without compensation for or consent of the “original” owners. In cases where the “original” owners are compensated, the amount of compensation varies from token sums to the full market value of the land.

There had been land reform schemes as early as during the ancient times—the Lex Sempronia Agraria proposed by Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, and passed by the Roman Senate in 133 BC, was one such scheme—but land reform became an issue of particular significance in the modern period, and particularly in the last century. The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917, as well as the revolution in China that Mao Zedong led to victory in 1949, resulted in major land reforms. The Cuban revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara implemented a land reform program after toppling the US-sponsored dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1959. Land reform was also a component of anti-imperialist struggles in Africa (notably in Namibia and Zimbabwe), the Arab countries, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

A few governments, like those of Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, have recognized the importance of land reform as a prerequisite for development and industrialization.

In most other parts of the world, however, land reform remains a dream for peasants to work toward—nay, a goal to struggle for. A number of governments have introduced limited “land reform” programs to defuse peasant discontent and prevent the onslaught of revolutionary

social change. Redistribution under such programs has been limited, as should be expected—with many “beneficiaries” finding their gains reversed after a certain period.

In the 1980s, driven by the debt crisis and the structural adjustment programs imposed by the Bretton Woods Twins, many governments struck land reform off their policy agenda and opted to pave the way for the development of land markets as part of toeing the neoliberal line. But the elite-oriented policies of neoliberalism caused, among other things, the revival in the 1990s of indigenous and peasant movements throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America—the homelands of the bottom two-thirds of humanity.

Within this global historical context, *Pro-Poor Land Reform: A Critique* by Saturnino M. Borras Jr. offers a contribution to the study of land reform from the Philippine experience. As Cristobal Kay, professor of rural development and development studies at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), writes in his foreword, “Borras’s book . . . appears at an opportune moment. It is the most comprehensive and up-to-date study ever published on the agrarian reform in the Philippines. The Philippine case is of particular interest given the long history of land reform, which began in 1963 and is still ongoing, as the current struggles of rural workers in the countryside testify. To this day many peasant leaders are assassinated in the Philippines for daring to defend the interests of the rural poor.”

Pro-Poor Land Reform, published by the University of Ottawa Press in 2007, is a product of what Borras describes as “formal/structured and informal unstructured elements”: his studies as a PhD candidate at the ISS and his involvement with various peasant movements in the Philippines since the 1980s.

The Philippine government reported in 2006 that six million hectares of land had been redistributed to some three million peasant households under its land reform program, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). The officially-claimed accomplishments under the CARP, which according to Borras is one of the few state-led land reform programs being implemented around the world, are far more extensive than similar programs in Brazil, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Critics of the CARP, which the administration of the late Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino considered the centerpiece of her presidency (1986-1992), disputed these claims as expected.

“Between the optimistic official claims and the pessimistic critiques, we attempt to determine what has actually happened in the Philippine

land reform process and what insights can be drawn from this national experience that are relevant to the current global land reform studies and debates,” Borras writes in his introduction.

Borras’s book, the main body of which is divided into five extensive chapters, draws heavily from government documents and position papers from various nongovernment and people’s organizations, as well as from interviews with government officials and peasant activists and advocates.

The first chapter, “The Politics of Redistributive Land Reform: Conceptual Reconsideration,” tackles the theoretical themes that lay the framework for Borras’s study of land reform. These are redistributive land reform, limitations to and opportunities for land reform in the contemporary period, and state-society interactions for land reform.

The second chapter, “Land and Tenancy Reforms in the Philippines: A National-Level View of Structures and Institutions, Processes and Outcomes,” discusses various land reform schemes in the Philippines within their historical contexts, and then proceeds to provide an overall analysis of the CARP’s main features.

“CARP’s Non-Redistributive Policies and Outcomes,” the third chapter shows the various ways in which landowners have been able to skirt the requirements of the official land reform program and how many of such outcomes have taken place throughout the nation.

In the next chapter, “CARP’s Redistributive Policies and Outcomes,” Borras takes up major cases under the CARP which according to him constitute real redistributive reform, and then shows the extent to which such outcomes were accomplished throughout the Philippines.

The fifth chapter, “State-Society Interactions for Redistributive Land Reform,” analyzes how state and society actors have each impacted the struggle for land reform.

In the end, Borras accomplishes the feat of showing that the government’s 2006 claim of having redistributed six million hectares of land to three million peasant households in the Philippines is grossly exaggerated. He, however, takes issue with what he describes as “the pessimistic predictions and sweeping dismissal” by some critics of what has been “achieved” in terms of land reform.

He offers, in his concluding chapter, insights and points to ponder for both state and society actors in the struggle for land reform—and even for landlords and their allies in the corridors of power:

Peasant struggles for land and power in the Philippines, and in many parts of the world, have persisted into the 21st century. As long as significant degrees of land-based exploitation, poverty, social exclusion, and rural political conflicts remain, these struggles will likely continue, and these will be marked by ebbs and flows. The dynamic ups and downs in the push for redistributive land reform will be determined, to a lesser degree, by the capacity of peasant movements and their societal allies to, themselves, launch political initiatives or by the technocratic state actors' ability to carry out autonomous reform actions. To a greater degree, however, successful outcomes will be determined by the ability of pro-reform societal and state actors to forge alliances and launch joint and/or parallel collective actions for redistributive land reform.

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Kuhonta, Erik Martinez, Dan Slater, & Tuong Vu (eds.). *Southeast Asia in Political Science: Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008. 455 pp.

Pernicious dualisms within the social sciences, particularly in political science, have continued in recent years, albeit minimally abated and on a more polite discourse level. First and foremost is the unbearably drawn out debate between qualitative and quantitative methods that has tested the civility of even the most polite of scholars. Added to these epistemological and ontological battlegrounds are the parallel debates on “small n” versus “large n” sample sizes, interpretivism versus positivism, meaning versus causal inferences, and—more specifically within comparative politics—universal theory formulation versus nuanced area studies. Oftentimes, the core issue of establishing viable bases of comparison, qualitative bases in this volume's case, as a key component of a sound comparative framework, is lost in the shrillness of the debate. This well-intentioned anthology is partly successful in addressing this theoretical and methodological quandary, but a significant amount of work remains.

This compilation of essays focusing on the past, present, and potential contributions of qualitative analysis in Southeast Asian