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**Published in:**

European Journal of Development Research

**Publication status and date:**

Published: 01/12/2003

**DOI (link to publisher):**

[10.1080/09578810312331287505](https://doi.org/10.1080/09578810312331287505)

**Document Version**

Version created as part of publication process; publisher's layout; not normally made publicly available

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**Citation for the published version (APA):**

Borras, S. M. (2003). Questioning the pro-market critique state-led agrarian reforms. *European Journal of Development Research*, 15(2), 109-132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09578810312331287505>

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## Questioning the Pro-Market Critique of State-Led Agrarian Reforms

SATURNINO M. BORRAS JR.

*This article examines the pro-market critique of state-led agrarian reforms (SLARs). This critique has become the imperative for , and foundation of, the contemporary market-led agrarian reform (MLAR) policy model. Various criticisms of the MLAR have been put forward, but none of these analysed MLAR's theoretical starting point, that is, its critique of SLARs. Looking at the various experiences in different countries, this article analyses the pro-market critique and concludes that it is theoretically flawed and largely without bases in fact. This conclusion hopes to expand and deepen the breadth and depth of the current debate on land reform.*

In the early 1990s, the market-led agrarian reform model (MLAR) was formulated by broadly pro-market scholars and policy-makers, <sup>1</sup> and aggressively promoted by the World Bank (WB) as the solution to persistent landlessness in the countryside of most developing countries. The MLAR policy model was constructed out of the pro-market critique of state-led agrarian reforms (SLARs). Since then, there have been heated debates between different camps of scholars, policy-makers and political activists as to whether such a policy can resolve the land question within a pro-landless poor framework. What has not been thoroughly analysed and debated, though, is the pro-market critique of SLARs. A closer examination of this critique is crucial toward a better understanding of the land reform debate today because it is claimed to have provided the policy imperative for , and is the theoretical foundation of, the MLAR model. This article attempts to fill this gap. Using various experiences from different countries, it is argued here that the pro-market critique of SLARs is theoretically flawed and is not supported by empirical evidence. The following section presents the pro-market critique of

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I thank Jennifer Franco, Cristóbal Kay , Ben White, Armin Paasch and Manuel Quiambao for their constructive comments and suggestions on various earlier related draft papers. I also thank the anonymous referee for the comments and useful suggestions. However, I am directly responsible for the analysis, and any errors, in the final article.

The European Journal of Development Research, Vol.15, No.2, December 2003, pp.109–132  
PUBLISHED BY FRANK CASS, LONDON

SLAR; the next section proceeds to analyse the critique against the weight of empirical evidence from various country experiences; and the article concludes by offering further analytic discussion which encompasses the implications of the article.

#### THE PRO-MARKET CRITIQUE OF STATE-LED LAND REFORMS<sup>2</sup>

The basic assertion (or assumption) of the pro-market critique is that SLAR has failed to redistribute land to the landless poor. Deininger and Binswanger [1999: 267] conclude that 'most land reforms have relied on expropriation and have been more successful in creating bureaucratic behemoths and in colonizing frontiers than in redistributing land from large to small farmers' [1999: 267]. The pro-market critique then proceeds to explain the reasons for such failure.

The pro-market critique is particularly hostile to the state-led approach's concept of 'land size ceiling', which allows landlords to own land only under a maximum farm size. Deininger and Binswanger argue that 'ceiling laws have been expensive to enforce, have imposed costs on landowners who took measures to avoid them, and have generated corruption, tenure insecurity, and red tape' [1999: 263]. The same scholars explain that the usual payment to landlords which is below the market price and is made through staggered, partly cash-partly government bonds, allows time to erode the real value of the landowners' money, and so provokes landlords' resistance to reform [Binswanger and Deininger, 1996: 71]. In turn, this conservative reaction has led landlords to subvert the policy, evade coverage by subdividing their farms or retain the best parts of the land.<sup>3</sup> Protracted legal battles launched by landlords have slowed down – if not prevented – any reform implementation.

Moreover, according to this critique, the state-led approach has been 'supply-driven': it starts either by first identifying lands for expropriation then looks for possible peasant beneficiaries, or vice versa. This leads to heightened economic inefficiency when: a) productive farms are expropriated and subdivided into smaller, less productive farm units, or when environmentally fragile (usually public) lands are distributed by the state; or b) when peasant households 'unfit' to become beneficiaries are given lands to farm [World Bank, n.d.: 2].

Furthermore, according to the pro-market critique, the state-led approach relies heavily on the central state and its huge bureaucracy for implementation through top-down methods that fail to capture the diversity between and within local communities and are unable to respond quickly to the actual needs at the local villages [Gordillo, 1997: 12]. Binswanger [1996: 141–2] explains that

public sector bureaucracies develop their own set of interests that are in conflict with the rapid redistribution of land ... [and that] expropriation

at below market prices requires that the state purchase the land rather than the beneficiaries. While not inevitable, this is likely to lead to the emergence of a land reform agency whose personnel will eventually engage in rent-seeking behavior of its own.

Meanwhile, according to the critique, another consequence of the state-led approach is the distortion of the land market. This distortion prevents more efficient producers from acquiring or accumulating lands and forestalls the exit of inefficient farmers. According to Deininger and Binswanger [1999: 262–3], most developing countries are plagued with distorted land markets caused primarily by prohibitions on land sales and rentals by land reform beneficiaries or by landlords already marked for expropriation [see *de Janvry et al., 2001*]. This is thought to have prevented more efficient producers from acquiring or accumulating lands, blocked the entry of potential external investors, and prevented inefficient and bankrupt beneficiaries from getting out of production [*de Janvry, Sadoulet and Wolford, 2001*]. These prohibitions have led to informal land market transactions that, in turn, breed corruption within state agencies and drive land prices upward – bringing further distortion of land markets [*Banerjee, 1999; Gordillo, 1997: 12–19; Carter and Salgado, 2001; Carter and Mesbah, 1993*]. Furthermore, the pro-market critique laments that state-led agrarian reforms have usually been implemented without prior or accompanying progressive land taxation and without a systematic land titling programme – the absence of which contributes to land price increases beyond their ‘proper’ levels, encourages landlords toward ‘land banking’ or speculation and leads to complex competing claims over land that, again, result in land market distortions [*Bryant, 1996*].

The pro-market critique complains that the implementation sequence within state-led agrarian reforms, that is, ‘land redistribution before farm development projects’, has led to an essentially ‘land redistribution-centered’ programme because in most cases the state has failed to deliver support services to beneficiaries [*Deininger, 1999*]. On most occasions, support services are mainly via production and trade subsidies that are universal in nature – and so, in reality, the politically influential sector of large farmers and landlords benefited more than the small farmers. In addition, Deininger and Binswanger conclude that, ‘centralized government bureaucracies – charged with providing technical assistance and other support services to beneficiaries – proved to be corrupt, expensive, and ineffective in responding to beneficiary demands’ [1999: 266–7]. Therefore, post-land redistribution development has been uncertain and less than dynamic, has lacked important efficiency gains and has ‘resulted in widespread default [in repayments] and non-recoverable loans’ by beneficiaries [*Deininger and Binswanger, 1999: 267*]. Furthermore, it is argued that the state-led approach has driven away credit sources because

TABLE 1  
KEY FEATURES OF STATE- AND MARKET-LED APPROACHES  
BASED ON THE PRO-MARKET EXPLANATIONS

Issues	State-led	Market-led
<i>Getting Access to Land</i>		
Acquisition method	Coercive; cash-bonds payments at below market price	Voluntary; 100% cash payment based on 100% market value of land
Beneficiaries	Supply-driven; beneficiaries state selected	Demand-driven; self-selected
Implementation method	Statist-centralized; transparency and accountability = low degree	Privatised-decentralized; transparency and accountability = high degree
Pace and nature	Protracted; politically and legally contentious	Quick; politically and legally non-contentious
Land prices	Higher	Lower
Land markets	Land reform: cause of/aggravates land market distortions; progressive land tax and land titling programme not required	Land reform: cause and effect of land market stimulation; progressive land tax and titling programme required
<i>Post-Land Transfer Farm and Beneficiary Development</i>		
Programme sequence; pace of development and extension service	Farm developments plans <i>after</i> land redistribution. Protracted, uncertain and anaemic post-land transfer development; extension service statist-centralized = inefficient	Farm development plans <i>before</i> redistribution. Quick, certain, and dynamic post-land transfer development; extension service privatised-decentralized = efficient
Credit and investments	Low credit supply and low investments	Increased credit and investments
Exit options	None	Ample
<i>Financing</i>		
Mechanism	State 'universal' subsidies; sovereign guarantee; beneficiaries pay subsidized land price; 'dole-out' mentality among beneficiaries	Flexible loan-grant mechanism; co-sharing of risks; beneficiaries shoulder full cost of land; farm development cost given via grant
Cost of reform	High	Low

Source: Borras [2003].

expropriation pushes landlords (a traditional source of capital) away from farming, while formal credit institutions do not honor land award certificates from beneficiaries due to land sales and rental prohibitions [*Deininger, 1999*]. For the same reasons, potential external investors are discouraged from entering the agricultural sector [*Gordillo, 1997: 13*].

Finally, according to the pro-market critique, the fiscal requirement of the state-led approach is too costly on the part of the state that buys land from the landlords – who are paid whether or not the beneficiaries pay anything for the land. This is the same concept of ‘sovereign guarantee’ which has been applied in government-sponsored credit programmes that have failed in general. Moreover, the production- and trade-related ‘universal’ subsidies are too costly and wasteful, while the huge land reform bureaucracy eats up much of the programme budget [*Binswanger and Deininger, 1997*].

The pro-market critique is the most unsympathetic, but arguably the most systematic, critique of state-led approaches to agrarian reform from a strictly economic perspective. The alternative MLAR model has been constructed out of this pro-market critique of the SLAR. Deininger explains that the MLAR model is a ‘mechanism to provide an efficiency- and equity-enhancing redistribution of assets’ [*1999: 651*]. Deininger and Binswanger add that ‘this approach can help overcome long-standing problems of asset distribution and social exclusion’ [*1999: 249*].<sup>4</sup> Based on the pro-market critique, the MLAR model has developed strategies that are exactly the opposite of those in the state-led approach. Table 1 offers a summary.

To a varying extent, the MLAR model has been implemented in Brazil through the *Projeto Cédula da Terra* (PCT) since 1998, in Colombia through the *Agrarian Law 160 of 1994* since 1995 and in South Africa through the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP) since 1995.<sup>5</sup> Proponents of MLAR claim impressive success in these countries. However, such claims are now seriously questioned [*for example, Borras, 2003, 2002a; Sauer, 2002; Lahiff, 2001; Lahiff and Cousins, 2001; Levin and Weiner, 1997; El-Ghonemy, 2001*].

#### CRITIQUE OF THE CRITIQUE

The pro-market claim that SLARs have been a big failure in terms of redistributing land has no solid empirical bases. On the one hand, the land reform literature – both traditional and pro-market – has employed a rather crude, dichotomous framework in assessing outcomes of land redistribution, namely, ‘success’ or ‘failure’. This is analytically problematic. Most, if not all, land reform policies that have been implemented in most countries, regardless of their orientation (revolutionary, conservative or liberal), have resulted in varying degrees of ‘success’ or ‘failure’; meaning, outcomes have always been

partial. There is hardly any outcome that is either a complete success or a total failure. Land redistribution outcome is thus a matter of degree. On the other hand, and more empirically, various SLARs were able to achieve varying degrees of success in redistributing lands to millions of landless peasant households in many parts of the world historically – and many of these cases did redistribute privately controlled lands [ *see, for example, El-Ghonemy, 2001; Thiesenhusen, 1995; Kay, 1998; Griffin et al., 2002*]. Table 2 shows the land redistribution outcomes in a number of countries.

In some countries, greater degrees of land redistribution through SLAR have been achieved, but subsequent market-friendly or market-inspired policies partially reversed some reform accomplishments. Such are the cases of Chile after Pinochet grabbed power in 1973 [ *Kay and Silva, 1992* ], Nicaragua after the Sandinistas were voted out of power in the early 1990s and Guatemala years after the revolution in the 1950s [ *Thiesenhusen, 1995*]. In instances where a significant portion of productive farmlands have been excluded from land reform, it was due to pro-market considerations and the failure of the state to carry out SLARs – not due to any inherent character of SLARs per se. This has

TABLE 2  
LAND REDISTRIBUTION OUTCOMES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

Country	Period	Total Lands Redistributed (% vis-à-vis total agricultural land)	Total Number of Beneficiaries (% vis-à-vis total agricultural HHs)
Cuba (1)	since 1959	80	75
Bolivia (2)	1952–77	74.5	83.4
South Korea (13)	since 1945	65	77
Chile (3)	1964–73	nearly 50	20
Taiwan (11)	1949–53	48	48
Peru (4)	1963–76	42.4	32
Mexico (5)	1970 data	42.9	43.4
Philippines (14)	1972/88–2001	two-fifths	two-fifths
Japan (12)	1945–	one-third	70
Syria (12)	–	one-third	–
Ecuador (6)	1964–85	34.2	no data
El Salvador (7)	From 1980 through 1990s	20	12
Venezuela (8)	Up to 1979	19.3	24.4
Egypt (12)	1952–61	10	9
Costa Rica (9)	1961–79	7.1	13.5
South Africa (10)	1995–2000	1.65	2.0

Sources: (1) Kay [1998]; (2) Thiesenhusen [1989: 10–11]; (3) Kay [1998]; (4) De Janvry [1981: 206]; (5) Thiesenhusen [1989: 10–11]; (6) Zevallos [1989: 52]; (7) Paige [1996: 136]; (8) Paige [1996: 136], Dorner [1992: 48]; (9) Paige [1996: 136]; (10) South Africa Department of Land Affairs [2000]; (11) Griffin *et al.* [2002: 304–5]; (12) King [1977: 192 for Taiwan; 329 for Egypt; 390 for Syria]; (13) El-Ghonemy [1990: 283]; (14) Borras [2001a].

been the case in the exclusion of productive lands in Brazil [ *Hall, 1990: 221* ], commercial plantations in Kerala [ *Herring, 1990: 199* ] and white commercial farms in Zimbabwe (from 1980 until the late 1990s) [ *Bratton, 1990* ].

The reported and claimed land redistribution accomplishments by MLAR in Brazil – 15,000 households [ *see Sauer, 2002* ], Colombia – a few hundreds of households in five *municipios* [ *see Forero, 1999* ], and South Africa – a few hundred thousands of households [ *see Lahiff, 2001; DLA, 2000* ] are miniscule in comparison to the achievements of SLARs over time. MLAR's accomplishments, moreover, are still being questioned as to whether or not the 'results' are empirically correct and if they involved real redistributive reform [ *Borras, 2003* ].

Furthermore, the pro-market assertion that SLAR failed to effect rural development and poverty eradication is, again, analytically and empirically problematic. On the one hand, most, if not all, advocates of SLARs, past and present, have explicitly maintained no illusion that land redistribution is a magic panacea to rural poverty and underdevelopment. What has been asserted has been the notion that land redistribution is a necessary-but-not-sufficient requirement for rural development and poverty eradication. Thus, to assess SLAR within the imagined framework of a cure-all kind of policy – despite repeated clarification from its advocates – is to deliberately muddle the terms and mislead the direction of the debate. Nevertheless, and on the other hand, empirical evidence shows that the countries (or sub-national regions therein) which have carried out a greater degree of land redistribution in the past tend to have achieved a better level of national development – or have at least performed better in poverty eradication – than those countries (or sub-national regions) that have a lower or negligible degree of land redistribution. These are, for example, demonstrated in the cases of Japan, South Korea and China, where national development achievements have been phenomenal after land reforms [ *Stiglitz, 2002: 81; Griffin et al., 2002* ], Kerala and Cuba, where the degree of poverty eradication and broad-based human development have been exceptionally high [ *Herring, 1983; Deere, 2000* ], or Chile, where the contemporarily vibrant fruit exporting sector partly traces fundamental roots to earlier land reforms [ *Kay, 2002* ]. Finally, most of the relatively successful post-land reform national agricultural and rural development initiatives tended to be the ones that were carried out within the inward-looking, state-led development policies, especially during the import-substitution industrialisation (ISI) era. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China, Kerala, Vietnam and Cuba are a few examples [ *Griffin et al., 2002; Tai, 1974; see also Spoor, 2002* ]. Post-land reform development campaigns that have been significantly embedded within the neo-liberal policies since the 1980s have, to a varying extent, performed less dynamically: the Philippines is a good example [ *Borras, 2001b* ].



In short, the pro-market critique of the SLAR about its supposed failure to redistribute land to a significant extent and its supposed failure to effect rural development is theoretically and empirically problematic. Elaborate explanations with regard to SLAR's so-called failure have been put forward by its pro-market critics (as explained above). It is important to analyse these pro-market criticisms in detail.

*1. One of the main causes of the failure of SLAR is its acquisition method: coercive expropriation of land; compensation to landlords via the cash-bonds payment for the land expropriated at below market price level is a thin veil for confiscation that provokes and promotes landlord opposition to reform.*

It is true that most SLARs have been, in varying degrees, coercive, have usually paid landlords at below the market price for their lands, and that these policy features have relationships with the degree of success or failure of land redistribution campaigns. However, these occur in a manner different from the pro-market critique: most of the land reform policies that actually existed feature varying degrees of expropriation. It is hardly a case of complete expropriation or total non-expropriation, because even revolutionary policies made selective compromises – for example, the Nicaraguan case in the 1980s. Neither, arguably, is it a case that conservative policies possessed some elements of expropriation even when selective and limited – for example, the Marcos land reform in the Philippines in the 1970s [ see *Kerkvliet, 1979; Wurfel, 1988*].

This conceptual clarification is crucial to understanding the flaw of the pro-market argument: empirical evidence in many countries has shown that the land reform policies which have a lesser degree of expropriation and coercive power – and not those with a greater degree of expropriation and coercive power – have been the ones that tended to deliver a lesser degree of land redistribution outcomes. The implications of this, then, are that expropriation and coercion tended to result in a greater degree of success in land redistribution – and not failure, as claimed by the pro-market critique. This is seen in the varying land redistribution outcomes between and within countries: for example, a lesser degree in contemporary South Africa [ *Lahiff, 2001* ] compared to contemporary Brazil [ *Guanzirole, 2000* ]; a lesser degree in contemporary Brazil compared to the current Philippine experience [ *Borras, 2001a, 1999* ]; a lesser degree in revolutionary Nicaragua [ *Thiesenhusen, 1995* ] compared to revolutionary China [ *Griffin et al., 2002* ]; a greater degree during the 1930s in Mexico under Lazaro Cardenas in contrast with the accomplishment under subsequent administrations since the 1940s [ *Sanderson, 1984* ]; a lesser degree during the Frei era compared to the Allende period in Chile [ *Kay and Silva, 1992; Thome, 1989: 159* ]; and a lesser degree

during the Macapagal–Arroyo presidency (2000–2) compared to the Ramos administration (1992–98) in the Philippines [Borras, 2002b].

The presence of evasive and subversive actions of the landlords against a land reform policy is a good indicator of the policy's degree of real redistributive reform – that is, what land reform is all about. Redistributive reforms 'change the relative shares between groups' [Fox, 1993: 10]. Thus, by the nature of their class, landlords will oppose truly redistributive land reforms. As Diskin [1989: 431], in the context of El Salvador, explained:

it would be naive to assume that those who monopolise power and land will simply step aside and divest themselves of their wealth and social position. The Salvadoran rural oligarchy regularly advocates a 'trickle-down' argument while lobbying for less 'statism', that is, less reform.

Thus, landlord resistance is not unexpected. The cases of SLARs with a greater degree of success have demonstrated that the key challenge is not to look for reform models that will not be opposed by landlords, but rather to find ways on how to defeat landlord opposition.

*2. The 'supply-driven' approach of SLAR with regard selection of beneficiary and land is responsible for taking in 'unfit beneficiaries' and 'unfit lands' to become part of the reform, leading to greater inefficiency in land use and a 'dole-out' mentality among beneficiaries.*

Again, this pro-market assertion is theoretically problematic and generally without a basis in fact. On the one hand, it is analytically flawed because the traditional, political–economic and 'social justice' conception of redistributive land reform is to redistribute land in the direction of landowners to landless classes (or landed elite to landless poor peasants). A policy does not constitute real redistributive reform when the change in ownership and control over land resources occurs *within* elite classes (landowning or not). The logic of such a notion is that beneficiaries must be selected on the primary basis of class position – that is, landless rural poor (as opposed to the purely 'economistic' notion of most efficient land users – who will certainly be concentrated among landlords, agribusiness, rich peasants and other rural middle classes). Therefore, prior accounting of the population of landless peasants and farmlands for redistribution becomes necessary.

The notion of 'demand' or 'articulated or effective demand' among landless peasants also has to be problematised. Effective articulation of demand for land by landless peasants is facilitated or hindered by various political–economic factors within the rural polity and economy [see Fox, 1995, 1994; Platteau, 1995]. It is defined by existing power relations between different classes in the countryside. On many occasions, landless peasants are

coerced, repressed or tricked by the landowning classes not to make their demand for land articulated [ *see, for example, Kay, 2001; Scott, 1985; Scott and Kerkvliet, 1986; Kerkvliet, 1993* ]. Historically, ‘demands’ for land that were actually articulated have been either made by autonomous peasants and peasant movements and their allies, or, in a different context, by landlords and their co-opted peasants and peasant groups to stage-manage partial or even fake reforms [ *Borras, 2002b* ].

Moreover, the pro-market notion of taking in only the ‘fittest beneficiaries’ – that is, the most economically efficient and financially competitive peasants to take over the land – is diametrically opposed to the fundamental notion of redistributive land reform. The latter has been conceptualised precisely because of the need to create a class of efficient and competitive peasants (and/or rural proletariat). One requirement of this is control over land resources by the actual tillers (and/or workers), which can be facilitated through land reform [ *see Lipton, 1974; Byrnes, 1974* ]. It can very well be argued that all landless rural poor are not efficient and competitive precisely because they have no control over land. Such property-based deprivation breeds greater disadvantages – for example, social exclusion, political disempowerment, lack of formal education – that contribute to and perpetuate economic inefficiency and financial non-competitiveness. In the pro-market definition, the efficient and competitive are the ones who have secure control or ownership of lands. This argument is problematic. For example, in the context of southern Africa, how can the black landless rural poor be more economically efficient and competitive than the white commercial farmers when the former, reduced to the status of destitute (semi-)proletariats, have been denied the right to farm their own piece of land with a proper support services package? [ *See Bernstein, 1998; Levin and Weiner, 1997.* ] To give another example, how can the landless semi-proletariat Muslims on the island of Basilan (Philippines) be more efficient and competitive in running rubber plantations compared to the Christian (settler) regular (rubber plantation) farm-workers, when the former generally never got to work in such plantations after agri-corporations forcibly ejected them from their homeland to clear the area for plantation development at least a generation earlier? In short, the idea of ‘fittest beneficiaries who are economically efficient and competitive’ in the pro-market critique exposes the latter’s non-redistributive nature.

On the other hand, to claim that SLARs which actually existed have been supply driven with regard to beneficiary and land selection is correct in one aspect and wrong on another. It is correct in the qualified sense of the explanation cited above, but it is also empirically wrong because, in fact, a majority of land redistribution campaigns that witnessed a greater degree of success have been the ones that are marked by strong and sustained

articulated demand by peasants, peasant movements and their allies. This is demonstrated by peasants who joined wars and revolutions, such as in the German peasant war of 1525 [Bak, 1975] and the French, Mexican, Chinese, and Vietnamese revolutions [Wolf, 1969; Moore, 1967; Tuma, 1965; Huizer, 2001; Sanderson, 1984; Shillinglaw, 1974; Paige, 1975]. It is also demonstrated by the 'everyday forms of peasant resistance' [Scott, 1985; Scott and Kerkvliet, 1986] or in peasant actions in-between outright peasant wars and daily peasant resistance – such as militant land invasions and other forms of peasant claim-making in many parts of the world, past and present [see, for example, Hobsbawm, 1974; Petras, 1997; 1998; Kerkvliet, 1993; Rosset, 2001; Harvey, 1998; Lund, 1998; Redclift, 1978; Veltmeyer, 1997; Borras, 2001a]. These actions demonstrate articulated demand for land by the landless peasants.

Furthermore, on the issue of 'unfit lands' being redistributed, two interrelated points need clarification. Firstly, numerous SLARs had actually redistributed productive farmlands under the control of big landlords precisely because it is in these big estates where injustice and exploitation – notions that mainstream economists tend to dismiss – were prevalent. And redistribution of these big landholdings to landless peasants did not always result in economic inefficiency; in fact, on many occasions, it is quite the contrary [see, for example, Griffin et al., 2002; Stiglitz, 2002: 81; El-Ghonemy, 1990; Ghose, 1983]. Secondly, many SLARs redistributed unproductive and environmentally fragile lands, such as those – in some instances – in Brazil and Colombia [Thiesenhusen, 1995; 1989]. When this did occur, it was usually in settings where redistribution of privately controlled productive lands was not being carried out by the state to a large extent – so that landless peasants continued to assault already ecologically fragile public lands, prompting governments to formalise such peasant land claims in some cases [see Dorner, 2001; 1992]. In short, it is the failure of states to implement SLAR in productive farmlands in some countries – and not the SLAR per se – that tends to cause ecologically fragile lands to be redistributed to poor peasants.

*3. SLARs have been statist-centralised, and so have been slow – if not a total failure – in implementation.*

To a large extent, it is true that many of the SLARs that actually existed have been statist-centralised – but with a contrary outcome: land reform campaigns that had a greater degree of land redistribution tended to be the ones where the central state played an active role in a vastly centralised manner [Barraclough, 2001; El-Ghonemy, 2001], cognisant of the fact that the localities are the bastion of the landowning classes being targeted by land reform [see Griffin,

1980; Slater, 1989; Bernstein, 1998; Mamdani, 1996; Boone, 1998]. This approach is not the monopoly of socialist regimes: for example, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan [Tai, 1974; Griffin et al., 2002; King, 1977], Peru in late 1960s and early 1970s [Kay, 1983] and Egypt in the 1950s and early 1960s [Migdal, 1988] all adopted this approach. In contrast, SLARs that actually existed and had a lesser degree of success in land redistribution were the ones where the state had a low degree of political autonomy and capacity to carry out a truly sweeping redistributive land reform.

Meanwhile, a greater degree of success in land redistribution is not the monopoly of extremely statist-centralised regimes as argued by Tai [1974]. This has been demonstrated by Riedinger [1995] using the Philippine case, and Herring [1983: 234] using some south Asian cases. Moreover, many SLAR policies, when implemented, actually took a more interactive state–society relation where pro-reform forces coalesced to implement the reform. These interactions were relatively less statist and centralised, and more dynamic and polycentric – as the pro-reform forces within the state and in society asserted and assumed greater roles in carrying out the reform: for example, Mexico during the Cardenas period [Tannenbaum, 1968; Sanderson, 1984; Salamini, 1971; Grindle, 1986], Kerala [Herring, 1983; 1990], Niger [Lund, 1998] and contemporary Philippines between 1992 and 2000 [Borras, 2001a]. Even those generally perceived to be highly centralised regimes had in fact depended upon their coalition with pro-reform societal forces, such as the one in revolutionary China [Shillinglaw, 1974].

#### 4. SLARs have been protracted and legally contentious.

SLAR is about redistributing property rights and political power in society: it changes the relative shares between groups [Fox, 1993: 10]. It is this nature of the reform that causes it to be legally and politically contentious. Land reform policies that are not legally and politically contentious tend to be the conservative, non- or less redistributive, ones. However, the SLARs that actually existed have not been necessarily protracted in their implementation. In fact, some of the more successful land reforms were implemented in a sweeping manner [Prosterman and Riedinger, 1987], such as in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan [Griffin et al., 2002], Kerala [Herring, 1983], and China [Shillinglaw, 1974]. However, as reminded by Putzel [2002] and Bernstein [2002], such land redistribution campaigns must be viewed from a perspective of ‘episodes’ within the more strategic, longer continuum of policy implementation. This is partly illustrated in the sweeping implementation in Mexico during the 1930s under the Cardenas period and again in the 1960s in the northern part of Mexico [Sanderson, 1984; but see Harvey, 1998: 131].

Furthermore, the SLARs that have been slower and narrower in implementation have been the ones that provided significant roles to non-state, market mechanisms, such as the commercial reselling of 'friar lands' in the early twentieth century Philippines [ *Corpuz, 1997: 266–70; also Kerkvliet, 1977: 198–9* ] and even in contemporary Philippines, where built-in market-friendly mechanisms such as the voluntary land transfer and stock distribution schemes that open up highways through which landlords have launched anti-reform manoeuvres [ *Borras, 2002b* ]. This was also the case in Chile during the Alessandri and Frei periods in the 1960s [ *Thome, 1989* ], in Zimbabwe between 1980 and the early 1990s [ *Bratton, 1990; see Worby, 2001* ], the coffee sector in the El Salvadoran land reform [ *Paige, 1996* ] or in Chiapas state in Mexico through the Agrarian Rehabilitation Programme (PRA) – which was started in the early 1980s [ *Harvey, 1998: 153–4* ].

*5. The price of land being redistributed under SLARs is expensive – that is, more expensive than land sales that would have been transacted in the open market.*

This argument contradicts the first pro-market critique about expropriation being a 'thin veil' over confiscation. Some land reforms did confiscate lands and redistributed them for free to peasants, although most have paid the landlords at below market price. In general, the SLARs that actually existed have underpaid landlords for the lands [ *Thiesenhusen, 1995; Griffin et al., 2002; King, 1977; Herring, 1983; Tuma, 1965* ]. Certainly, there were some cases of overpricing, and these were of two broad types. One is the work of some corrupt government officials [ *for example, see Putzel, 1992: 363 for the cases in the Philippines* ], but this is not an inherent or dominant feature of SLARs as shown by most other positive country cases. The other is what proved to be more expensive and pervasive: lands covered under the market-friendly mechanisms that allowed landlords to 'overprice' lands. There are several examples of this: market friendly schemes under the Alessandri and Frei administrations in Chile [ *Thome, 1989* ], lands of the monarchy confiscated after the 1789 revolution in France resold at full cost and totally unaffordable for poor peasants [ *Tuma, 1965; Moore, 1967; Jones, 1991* ] or the 1903 case of friar lands in the Philippines [ *Corpuz, 1997: 266–70; and Kerkvliet, 1977: 198–9* ]. Nevertheless, and arguably, the notion of 'overpricing' is inherently monetarist and has fundamental tension with the concept of 'land having multidimensional character'. That is, if a land's value has political, social, economic and cultural dimensions, the notion of 'overpricing' cannot and must not be reduced to the narrow 'monetarist' perspective.

### 6. SLARs undermine the land market.

Actually, existing land markets in most developing countries are ‘distorted’ but, arguably, such ‘distortions’ are caused principally by pre-existing land monopolies, and only secondarily (and temporarily) by existing land sales and rental prohibitions within land reform laws. ‘Perfect land markets’ – the heart of the MLAR theoretical model, supposedly toward achieving ‘land reform’ – cannot emerge and function without prior real redistribution that effects a more egalitarian distribution of property rights over land resources [ *see Carter and Mesbah, 1993; Carter and Salgado, 2001* ]. Finally, many cases of further distortions in the already distorted land markets were exacerbated not by SLARs per se but by market-friendly mechanisms therein or by totally market friendly land policies. These are the cases of the MLAR implementation in northeast Brazil [ *Grosso et al., 1998; Sauer, 2002* ], South Africa, Colombia [ *Borras, 2003* ] and in the implementation of the voluntary land transfer scheme within the current Philippine land reform programme [ *see Putzel, 2002; Borras, 2002b* ]. Again, though, the concept of ‘land as having multidimensional character’ has inherent tension with the monetarist notion of ‘land market’. In fact, ‘distortion’ is a highly subjective concept: for the monetarist, pro-market scholars, ‘distortion’ occurs due to state regulations; for the advocates of the concept of ‘land as having multidimensional character’, ‘distortions’ occur due to an unregulated monopolistic land market controlled and manipulated by the landowning classes.

7. *SLAR's sequence of 'farm plans and development after land redistribution' caused the failure of agrarian reforms in particular and the agriculture sector in general; moreover, the 'supply-driven', statist-centralised extension services have been inefficient – contributing further to SLAR's failure.*

Most SLARs have indeed been implemented in this sequence. Yet to claim that this is the cause of failure in farm and agricultural development is to mislead the direction of the debate. This is because while land redistribution is a necessary factor for rural development, it is never the sole one. There are many more factors that are at play [ *Griffin, 1976; Byrnes, 1974: 224; Kay, 1998, 2002; Lehmann, 1974; Lipton, 1974, 1993* ]. SLARs that carried out such a sequential approach produced mixed results: greater but varying degrees of agricultural and national development, such as those in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China and Kerala [ *Griffin et al., 2002* ], and lesser but varying degrees of agricultural development, such as the case of contemporary Philippines [ *Putzel, 2002; Franco, 1999b, 2000* ]. There is no empirical evidence that this sequential approach is the culprit in the lacklustre performance in post-land-transfer agricultural development in some countries.

Interestingly, the discourse of ‘farm plans first before land redistribution’ is also a discourse and argument of anti-reform landlords. Where this has taken prominence, land reform and agricultural development tended to have slowed down and become stunted, such as in the Philippines since the late 1990s [Borras, 2002b] and post-Apartheid South Africa [see Lahiff, 2001; Lahiff and Cousins, 2001]. Finally, there is no empirical basis for the pro-market claim that the ‘supply-driven’ and statist-centralised nature of most extension services has contributed to SLARs’ failure (when and where ‘failure’ did occur) to effect rural development. The debate in this regard goes far beyond the issue of agrarian reform and into broader micro- and macro-economic issues and industrialisation policies [Lehmann, 1974] – and the empirical evidence does not always support the pro-market arguments and claims [see, for example, Spoor, 2002; Kay, 2002; Saith, 1990].

*8. Credit in the rural economy is drained because of, and investments driven away by, SLARs.*

This is not supported by empirical evidence in most of the countries that have undergone a significant degree of land redistribution, such as Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Kerala, Chile and contemporary Philippines. The logic of capital dictates that credit and capital will go where it can make profit – thus, it could be in (land) reform or the non-reform sector. The same logic governs the dynamics of investments. In fact, empirical evidence shows that public and private investments came in land reform areas – and that new investments came not only from the traditional elites or government, but, more importantly from peasant beneficiaries as well [see, for example, Franco, 1999b, for recent Philippine cases].

*9. SLAR’s funding mechanism – in the form of ‘universal subsidy’ – is wasteful, and cultivates a ‘dole-out’ mentality among peasant beneficiaries.*

Among the various types of public investments, subsidising the ability of poor peasants to secure property rights over land resources and the corollary of extension services by way of funding land reform has perhaps been one of the most useful – not wasteful – types [see, for example, Herring, 1990: 73]. A more egalitarian distribution of control over land resources and access to extension services had, historically, been crucial ingredients to several phenomenal agricultural and national development campaigns. This is true in countries that did not have a history of a significant degree of land monopoly before their national development, such as the United States (except its southern portion [see Byres, 1996]) and Argentina, or in countries that had



significant degree of land redistribution before accomplishing national development, such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan immediately after the Second World War, Vietnam since 1975 [Griffin *et al.*, 2002] and Cuba [Deere, 2000]. The investments made by states in these countries in the form of universal subsidies to poor peasants have been extremely useful and productive.

Moreover, there is no consensus in the literature as to whether the so-called 'repayment default' by peasants on their loan obligations from land redistribution programmes or extension services constitutes an example of a 'dole-out' mentality (or some sort of everyday form 'of peasant claim-making *vis-à-vis* the state'?). It is an issue that needs deeper empirical investigation aimed at moving the analysis beyond mere assertions (by the pro-market critique). In fact, the MLARs in Brazil and Colombia have been plagued by the same phenomenon [see Sauer, 2002; Borras, 2003]. Finally, targeted public spending via market-friendly land redistribution mechanisms based on commercial land sales, in fact subsidises landlords and penalises poor peasants and the public in general. It is, then, a waste of public funds and, arguably, promotes a 'dole-out' mentality among landlords. This is seen in many cases of commercial land sales that have been passed on as 'land reforms', either through the MLAR programmes or MLAR-like mechanisms within broadly SLAR-type policies.

#### *10. SLAR's financial cost is high and unaffordable.*

It is true that land reform programmes require significant public spending, especially when these involve the expropriation of highly productive farms. However, when viewed from the perspective of strategic public investment, such spending is reasonable and affordable [Herring, 1990: 73]. It must also be noted that, historically, the greater degree of expropriation the land reform policy had the less expensive it had become, while the more market friendly it was, the more expensive it turned out to be. This can be seen partly by comparing cases within nations: such as the cases of the Frei and Allende land reforms in Chile in the 1960s and 1970s respectively [Thome, 1989] and the state-led national land reform versus the market-based PCT project in Brazil [Sauer, 2002; Borras, 2002a; 2003]. It can also be seen by comparing countries, such as the Chinese and Filipino cases [Griffin *et al.*, 2002; Putzel, 1992].<sup>6</sup>

Major state-led land reform campaigns proved financially affordable even in circumstances marked by fiscal difficulty, such as those in revolutionary China [Shillinglaw, 1974] and Nicaragua [Collins, Lappé and Allen, 1982], and in Chile [Thome, 1989] and Kerala [Herring, 1983]. In contrast, even less dramatic market-friendly land reform initiatives proved

financially unaffordable, such as in contemporary South Africa and Colombia [Borras, 2003].

#### FURTHER DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The ten-point discussion above has addressed the most crucial issues tackled in the pro-market critique of SLARs. Completing the critique of the pro-market critique is a further discussion on four interlinked analytical issues. Firstly, the pro-market critique does not analyse SLAR based on what it really is, on its original, broad theoretical policy and political frameworks. This can be seen in at least three ways. (1) In general, SLARs have been conceived based on the political-economic perspective of the agrarian structure where power and power relations between different social classes within the state and in society are at the centre of the push for or pull away from a more egalitarian distribution of property rights over land resources [El-Ghonemy, 1990; Thiesenhusen, 1995; de Janvry, 1981; Lehmann, 1974]. Instead of confronting SLARs within the political-economic framework, the pro-market critique limits its analysis to the purely economic perspective, neglecting the questions of power relations between inherently antagonistic social classes. (2) SLARs have always been approached from a historical perspective in view of the attempt to correct historical injustice committed against landless peasants. Instead of addressing SLARs within such a context of 'social justice', the pro-market critique centres its analysis on a generally ahistorical view of the problem of landlessness and limits its concerns on the issue of economic efficiency. (3) SLARs have always treated land as having a multidimensional (socio-economic, political and cultural) character. The pro-market critique ignores such a view about land, and instead puts forward a critique of SLARs which is based solely on the assumption that land is just a factor of economic production. Thus, the pro-market critique is a very partial accounting of SLARs. Moreover, even in this already limited range of issues, its arguments are highly questionable. Its main flaw is partly caused by the overemphasis on economism in its approach and its attempt to depoliticise the question of land reform and rural development [see Harriss, 1982: 16].

Secondly, while the pro-market critique does not include in its analyses several significant aspects of SLARs, it does include several analytic issues that are, strictly speaking, not inherent components of SLARs. For example, the pro-market critique repeatedly hammers SLARs on the basis that the latter failed to effect rural development and poverty eradication, despite the fact that proponents of SLARs have, past and present, repeatedly clarified that while it is a necessary requirement in the development process, SLARs cannot solve all the problems. In other words, SLARs are not a magic panacea to all the socio-

economic and political problems. This earlier clarification is captured in Keith Griffin's [1976: 10] explanation:

A land reform, in isolation, is not sufficient to remove rural poverty, but it is a *conditio sine qua non* in many countries. Unfortunately, it is a necessary step that is difficult to implement; there are no easy or painless solutions to the problems of poverty and underdevelopment, and it would be disingenuous to pretend otherwise.

He concluded: 'On the other hand, to refrain from making the effort on grounds of political impossibility would be defeatist as well as historically inaccurate.'

Thirdly, the pro-market critique presents and analyses SLAR as if it is a singular, homogeneous theoretical construct and policy model. The fact is that SLARs have multiple theoretical-ideological conceptions, policy designs and actual practices, broadly categorised in its ideal/typical types – namely revolutionary, conservative and liberal, or socialist- or capitalist-oriented [see, for example, Sobhan, 1993; Walinsky, 1977; Lehmann, 1974; Bernstein, 2002; Thiesenhusen, 1995; King, 1977; Tuma, 1965; Ross, 1998]. Moreover, and in fact, most SLARs that actually existed had varying degrees of market-oriented mechanisms within them. Thus, a simplistic, undifferentiated view of SLARs is not useful in any way.

In conclusion, this article has demonstrated that the pro-market critique of the state-led agrarian reforms that actually existed in many countries in the world is theoretically and empirically problematic. In the context of the ongoing debate, the most crucial pro-market assertion (or assumption) is the so-called 'failure' of SLARs to redistribute lands and effect rural development and poverty alleviation; this is not historically supported by empirical evidence in numerous countries. However, this is not to claim that SLARs have been flawless in theory and practice. SLARs have major problems in theory and practice, many of which have been correctly raised in nuanced analyses put forward by numerous scholars [for example, Deere, 1985; Lipton, 1993; Byres, 1974; Dorner, 1992; Barraclough, 2001; de Janvry, 1981; Kay, 1998; Thiesenhusen, 1995; Hirtz, 1998; Herring, 1983; Grindle, 1986; Ghimire, 2001; El-Ghonemy, 2001; Prosterman et al., 1990; Bernstein, 2002].<sup>7</sup>

The findings and conclusion of this article have two interrelated implications. On the one hand, they show that the MLAR model is problematic because the policy imperatives that ostensibly necessitated its construction and the theoretical foundation upon which it stands are highly questionable. On the other hand, they challenge the current land reform literature and debate to expand and deepen their analytical and empirical breadth and depth.

## NOTES

1. 'Pro-market' here is taken within the loose and broad sense to include neoclassical and neo-institutional economists.
2. This section is drawn from Borras *2002a; 2003*.
3. See de Janvry and Sadoulet [1989], and de Janvry *et al.* [2001].
4. It is important to note, however, that, at least in theory, the priority policy of the WB is not on land-sales-based schemes like MLAR, but rather on the promotion of share tenancy reforms anchored on a liberalised land rental market. Deininger [1999: 666] commented: 'Negotiated land reform is a complement rather than a substitute for other forms of gaining access to land, especially land rental' (see WB, 2003). Sadoulet, Mugai and de Janvry [1998: 1] explained that 'Tenancy contracts serve as instruments for the landless to gain access to land and for landowners to adjust their ownership units into operational units of a size closer to their optimum. In providing an entry point into farming, tenancy for the landless holds promise for eventual land ownership and vertical mobility in the "agricultural ladder" ... We conclude with policy recommendation to preserve and promote access to land for the rural poor via land rental market'. Cf. Byres [1983].
5. In most WB documents it is claimed that a pilot project for MLAR is also ongoing in the Philippines. This is false. It was only in early 2002 that a small 'feasibility study' was carried out involving more-or-less 100 households. For the earlier foiled attempts of the WB to start a pilot project in the Philippines, refer to Franco [1999a]; refer also to Putzel [2002] for a related discussion.
6. Refer also to Prosterman and Riedinger [1987], and to the various discussions by Ladejinsky in Walinsky [1977].
7. It is not, however, the purpose of this article to elaborate on these issues.

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