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GEOGRAPHY AND LAND REFORM

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ABSTRACT. In this article I examine a range of issues raised in recent geographical studies of land reform. I briefly discuss the career of land reform, review a selection of geographical publications on land reform in a range of places in the global south and even the global north, note some prominent themes and silences, and raise points for discussion and debate about the direction a geography-of-land-reform literature might take. My aim is to help geographers who are interested in land reform identify ways in which they might more purposively develop a literature that heretofore has not been considered a whole. *Keywords:* community, global south, land reform, neoliberalism.

Land reform entails policies, programs, or actions that alter the distribution of land and the ways in which it is owned or occupied. It can be a top-down affair, as in the classic, state-led projects pursued in numerous newly independent or post-colonial settings (for a comprehensive review, see Bernstein 2002), or bottom-up, as actions of O Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra (The Movement of Rural Landless Workers; MST) in Brazil exemplify. Once occupying a highly prominent position in debates about development, land reform dropped off the agenda during the heyday of neoliberal-style reforms in the 1980s and 1990s. But it has begun to make a comeback in the twenty-first century, not least because of events in Zimbabwe and new land-reform processes in numerous other places in the global south—for example, South Africa, Brazil, and Venezuela—and in the global north—Scotland, for instance.

Geographers are by no means the most prominent scholars addressing land reform. But a small group of geographers has noted its return, and their work, which this special issue of the *Geographical Review* further reinforces, is diverse and relatively wide-ranging both regionally and thematically. In addition to contributions in which land reform is part of the context for geographical inquiry (Wolmer 2005; Crane 2006; Potts 2006), it is also possible to detect a burgeoning but mostly disconnected literature in which land reform is a central issue (McCusker 2004; Wolford 2004, 2005, 2007; Mackenzie 2006a, 2006b; Fraser 2007a; King 2006, 2007). Something approaching a geography-of-land-reform literature, multidisciplinary in its

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nature and diverse in its interests and specializations, is developing. Unfortunately, however, because this upsurge has not generated much discussion, its potential or most desirable direction has not been adequately considered. A provocative contribution, one that generates debate and discussion, is needed. My objective here, therefore, is to help fill that gap.

THE ASCENDANCY, DECLINE, AND RENAISSANCE OF LAND-REFORM DEBATES

For vastly different reasons, numerous states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America pursued land-reform programs during the “developmentalist moment” between 1950 and 1970 (Bernstein 2002, 434). In Latin America, for example, the United States-backed Alliance for Progress promoted land reform as a way to stamp out the threat of communism; in other places, land reform was intended to assist realizing socialist or communist visions. Although such variation reflected “fundamentally different conceptions” of development, the approaches shared a “conception of the fundamentally reactionary character of pre-capitalist landed property” (p. 438). They also shared another characteristic: the state’s prominent role as guardian, provider, and manager. For example, the state would expropriate or purchase land, reallocate resources to and often protect—from imports, for example—land-reform beneficiaries, or set in motion mechanisms to support agriculture on redistributed land.

But amid the then-emergent neoliberal projects in the 1970s and 1980s, the state’s central position as the driver of land reform became untenable. Neoliberal orthodoxy demanded “rolling back” the state—for example, via privatizing state-run enterprises—at the same time as states were pressured to “roll out” other market-friendly adjustments (Peck and Tickell 2007). State-led redistributive land reform fell from grace in this context. In its place, the World Bank set forth and then helped fund the rolling out of a type of land reform known as market-led agrarian reform (MLAR) in Mexico, the Philippines, South Africa, and a range of other places (Deininger and Binswanger 1999; see also Borrás 2003). MLAR calls for a shift away from state-led, supply-driven approaches and toward a market-friendly, negotiated, and demand-driven style of land reform; negotiated and demand-driven, that is, because landowners must be “willing sellers” and beneficiaries must have demonstrated their determination to use the land commercially. MLAR entails acquiring land from so-called willing sellers rather than via expropriation and delivering land for commercial, rather than subsistence, purposes and only if beneficiaries demonstrate their determination to acquire it. In other words, MLAR is a demand-driven model. The rolling out of this “new wave” of land reform alters the meaning of land questions in the contemporary period (Bernstein 2002): Land reform is now supposed to be about economic growth and market efficiencies, rather than land-rights claims, alleviation of poverty, or banishment of predatory, precapitalist property holders. The different meaning of land reform under MLAR approaches poses a range of new research questions, particularly about how likely the approaches are to succeed and how to measure any such success.

Various other developments since the mid-to-late 1990s have catapulted land reform back onto the agenda. In some places, such as Zimbabwe, a controversial form of redistributive or “fast-track” land reform has occurred (Bernstein 2004, esp. 210–220; see also Moyo and Yeros 2005). Indeed, no place better exemplifies the deserved centrality of land questions and land reforms to debates regarding development than Zimbabwe. Land reform also occupies a prominent place in debates about South Africa. Postapartheid land-reform policies, partly unfolding in the shadow of Zimbabwe’s efforts, have progressed slowly but—to some extent—surely. The land question in South Africa frequently hits the headlines, often outside the country, where the governing party’s treatment of private-property rights in general and rights of white farmers in particular generates considerable interest, not least among editorial staffs of Europe-based media organizations. In addition, stated reforms have begun and look likely to expand in Venezuela and Bolivia, reforms that have the potential to attract the ire of conservative, liberal, and, especially, neoliberal critics of Latin America’s new left wing but that may also address inequities and landlessness and thereby validate claims about the resurgence of landless people’s movements (Moyo and Yeros 2005).

Land reform has also emerged in places outside the developing-world arenas in which it has had a prominent career and in which most research has occurred. Scotland, for example, has an ongoing and innovative program (Mackenzie 2006a, 2006b). In some countries in Eastern Europe and other parts of the former Soviet empire, moreover, land reform has surfaced as an issue of considerable importance (Dawidson 2005). What these cases indicate is the enduring legacy of colonial—or imperial—era land expropriations and associated maldistributions.

GEOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH ON LAND REFORM

Geographers have noted the resurgence of land reform. In what follows in this section I discuss a selection of what I perceive to be some of the most promising recent geographical studies of land reform; recent, that is, because my interest is in exploring the potential for new connections among geographers who are currently studying the topic. But first a clarification: Land reform is by no means a—or, indeed, the—central issue in all of this literature; rather, in many instances it is just part of the backdrop, a contextual and often highly contingent matter. Consider, for example, Deborah Potts’s fascinating research, which examines some effects of Zimbabwe’s economic meltdown on contemporary urbanization (2006). The economic collapse, she argues, has “so undermined the economic advantages of the city that, in terms of rural versus urban living standards, most recent migrants judged that it had either not been ‘worth’ migrating to the city or felt they had not gained anything” (p. 547). Land reform is there, in the background, but it is far from Potts’s core concern. Land reform is also part of the context for Gillian Hart’s examination of the discourses, practices, and contradictions of hegemonic neoliberal capitalism in contemporary South Africa (2002). Hart uses the case of redistributive land reform in Taiwan to argue in favor of a similar approach in South Africa, which, she

argues, would provide a social wage for historically disadvantaged groups. As a result of these examples, then, it would be slightly misleading to classify all geographers who are discussing land reform as part of—or, indeed, even interested in developing—anything approaching a geography-of-land-reform literature. In contrast, land reform is a crucial, even necessary condition for a good swathe of other geographical research, so I focus most of my energy on this group.

Land reform has been at the core of research conducted in a variety of places around the world. Perhaps foremost within this literature is Wendy Wolford's impressive work (2003, 2004, 2005, 2007). Her analyses and interpretations of agrarian struggle amid top-down and bottom-up land-reform actions in Brazil exemplify the gains that can be made by approaching the study of land reform from a geographical perspective. Much of her research focuses on the MST, whose tactics of invading and occupying land amplified an already charged political climate around the distribution of land. Wolford has charted the rise and prominence of the MST, as well as the context for its activities and the response of some Brazilian landowners. Drawing on primary research and the broader literature on Brazil's land question, she examines how the MST seeks to produce a community of activists and supporters that stretches across and beyond the immediate locales in which it operates (2003). Positioning her research agenda within the literature on contentious politics and using explicitly geographical language, she also analyzes how the spatial imaginaries of small farmers and plantation workers differentially affected their bold decisions to join the MST and participate in land occupations that place them at risk of violence (Wolford 2004; see also Simmons and others 2007).

Wolford has added to these contributions by theorizing the existence, significance, and differential power of the "agrarian moral economies" of landowners and landless groups (2005). The competing arguments of landowners and MST supporters "define the optimal organization of society, including most importantly an outline of how society's productive resources (in this case, land) ought to be divided" (p. 243). Such moral arguments about land in Brazil, she argues, are "constituted through and embedded in historically and culturally specific production relations" and are "most easily visible when the social group's economic or political position is challenged, or when the productive resource is seen as dangerously scarce" (p. 243). The Brazilian government's response to the MST's activities has been to roll out a more market-friendly approach to land reform. The Brazilian approach articulated with the landowners' interpretation of society and their understanding of the role of the market and reinforced elite claims on the land. Such elite-driven "agrarian moral economies" helped delegitimize "the idea of state-led agrarian reform" and question the value of what she calls "alternative moral economies and alternative paths to development" (p. 257). Thus Wolford's research calls into question claims by MLAR supporters that market-friendly approaches depoliticize land-reform efforts (with reference to Chiapas, Mexico, see Bobrow-Strain 2004).

Southern Africa is another arena in which land reform has been at the core of geographical research. Indeed, geographers have made timely and innovative contri-

butions. With respect to South Africa, for example, geographers have conducted studies that have helped set agendas for future research. Of particular note is “*No more tears . . .*,” an excellent introductory overview of the land question and the South African government’s three-pronged land-reform program (Levin and Weiner 1997; see also Mather 2002). Other geographers have examined the geohistorical context and associated legacies with which land reform in rural South Africa must necessarily deal. A crucial element in this regard is South Africa’s peculiar political geography, particularly the former homelands in which many potential land-reform beneficiaries now reside. Brian King’s contribution has been to examine some of the difficulties in reincorporating a place such as KaNgwane into the rest of the new South African polity (2006, 2007). Maano Ramutsindela, meanwhile, takes a wider view of South Africa’s land-reform approach, especially the way in which it has actually reinforced, rather than broken down, the spatial boundaries and demarcations of apartheid (2007). Employing a diverse range of methods, Brent McCusker combines on-the-ground research with remote sensing to assess the impact of land reform on farms in South Africa’s Limpopo Province (2004). His contribution is a useful demonstration of an innovative approach to studying the impact of land-reform projects. Tor Benjaminsen and his colleagues have adopted another impressive approach (2006). Their work interrogates inherited understandings of the carrying capacity of range ecologies in the context of land reform and develops an alternative way of assessing what land reform can achieve.

Partly because the redistribution element of land reform in South Africa has not progressed as perhaps initially expected, its restitution dimension, which entails the state’s attempt to restore land rights to individuals and groups dispossessed since 1913, has attracted geographers’ attention. Some contributions have drawn on primary research to examine particular instances of restitution; examples include the Schmidtsdrift case in the Northern Cape Province (Philander and Rogerson 2001) and the Makuleke land deal in Limpopo Province (Ramutsindela 2002). In the former, Diane Philander and Christian Rogerson examine participatory planning of local economic development strategies to alleviate poverty and address apartheid legacies. Their work demonstrates the locally specific as well as more national complexities of negotiating the challenges set forth by the restitution component of South Africa’s land reform. Ramutsindela’s research on the Makuleke restitution case has illuminated other complexities, especially use of the restored land (2002). Restoration of land rights inside the Kruger National Park demanded sensitive negotiations between a wide range of land users and the intended beneficiaries, negotiations that the national importance of the park to South Africa’s all-important tourism industry made all the more difficult. Restoration of land rights under restitution poses further questions for those who deliver and receive land when it involves farms that generate considerable foreign currency. In the case of restitution in the Levubu area of Limpopo Province, for example, I demonstrate that controversial settlement arrangements reflect the influence of MLAR-style land-reform practices as well as more stentorian approaches that are highly reminiscent of state-

led land-reform practices (2007a). The state cajoled the Levubu beneficiaries into accepting risky partnerships that, even though they entailed the restoration of land rights, restrict what the beneficiaries can do with their land.

Ikubolajeh Logan positions detailed empirical studies of urban food security within the context of Zimbabwe's "fast-track" land reform (2007). Another line of research in Zimbabwe asks whether wildlife management can be reconciled with redistributive land reform (Wolmer and others 2004; Wolmer 2005). In a South African context, a similar sort of project examines the role of farm dwellers in achieving biodiversity conservation in the Eastern Cape Province (Crane 2006). Conclusions from both settings identify significant scope for land reform to improve rural people's livelihoods in tandem with ecological or environmental protection, but only under certain—and often difficult-to-attain—conditions.

Places such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Brazil therefore stand out on the map of geographical studies of land-reform processes. But other places also deserve some mention here. For example, a community-driven but state-sanctioned form of land reform in northwestern Scotland has attracted noteworthy attention. Two recent articles by Fiona Mackenzie examine the terms, concepts, and significance of community purchases of land on the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides (2006a, 2006b). The first considers how collective ownership of land reconfigures its meaning and makes it possible to imagine more just futures (Mackenzie 2006a), whereas the second focuses on the potential of land reform to disturb the inevitability of "global narratives" that expect enclosure and privatization (Mackenzie 2006b). In India, furthermore, Raju Das conducted research on land reform (1999). Das situated his work relative to theories of the state in Marxist geography and the agrarian studies literature more generally. He examined the class alignment of Indian society and concluded that the state's bureaucratic rather than popular form reduced the potential impact of land reform. Mindful of geographical unevenness, however, he pointed out that specific outcomes of land reform were not equally a failure everywhere.

THEMES AND SILENCES IN GEOGRAPHICAL LAND-REFORM STUDIES

For good reasons, interest in notions of community is quite widespread. In some contexts, such as South Africa, certain aspects of land-reform legislation encourage community ownership and management of land. An example is the restitution component of South Africa's land reform, which encourages groups of people dispossessed of rights in land to form community associations through which to manage restored land and ensure equality in how any benefits are shared. Concepts of—and processes that define (or even exclude people from)—community are germane to how land reform occurs. Research on restitution, therefore, justifiably displays a degree of sensitivity to community. Ramutsindela's work on the Makuleke land claim in Limpopo Province sheds light on some of the internal dynamics of restitution communities (2002). Moreover, I have discussed how the government's decision to grant land rights to communities of beneficiaries helped create the conditions in

which certain traditional leaders and their allies could hijack restitution and position themselves to receive a disproportionate share of any benefits accruing from the land (2007b). Allison Goebel also notes such difficulties in defining “community” equitably with respect to Zimbabwe (2005). She explains, for example, how land-reform efforts that privilege traditional leaders over other groups, particularly women, produce injustices that prove difficult to overcome. And Elizabeth Lunstrum explores some of the dynamics of community landownership in Mozambique (2008).

But questions regarding definitions and implications of communities in land-reform contexts also arise outside southern Africa. In Scotland, for example, legislation enables crofters to form trusts, such as the North Harris Trust, which took control of the land. The new arrangement, Mackenzie writes (2005a), is a type of community fundamentally different from that which preceded land reform. In the new situation, collective rights have been recast, and the political possibilities of the land have been redefined. Such complex notions of community resonate with other cases discussed in the geographical literature on land reform. In Brazil, for instance, the MST constructed particular notions of community via its publications and activities. The idea that communities can be produced—conjured up by activism and solidarity—helps explain why the MST’s strategies have been successful in meeting the movement’s long-term goals of occupying land and providing its members with better living conditions and futures (Wolford 2003).

A second theme in the geographical literature on land reform is—loosely, perhaps—neoliberalism, which certainly looms large as an issue of concern in the geography discipline more generally. With particular regard to land reform, neoliberalism emerges as an important matter because neoliberal principles and ideologies underpin MLAR-style land-reform approaches. Geographers, such as Wolford (2003, 2004, 2005), Fraser (2007a), Lunstrum (2008), and Eric Perramond (2008), have noted that World Bank-inspired MLAR approaches, which privilege negotiated, market-friendly modes of land acquisition, have been rolled out in a range of places, albeit with varying degrees of success (see also Deininger and Binswanger 1999; Bernstein 2002; Borras 2003). Scholars have theorized that these MLAR approaches fit within a neoliberal frame insofar as they prioritize market-led over state-led mechanisms and seek to achieve land reform without causing more general disruption to economic growth strategies. Instead of pursuing radical types of land reform (Kepe and Cousins 2002), some governments in places where land questions continue to rankle are still implementing MLAR-style programs.

The critique advanced by some geographers is that MLAR approaches tend to ignore “the long history of land acquisition through thievery, personal connections, and domination and overlook the obstacles to individual well-being caused by overwhelming inequality in access to land” (Wolford 2005, 257). MLAR approaches therefore do little to undermine the power of dominant groups or classes; indeed, they tend to benefit existing elites rather than the poorest or the most land hungry. In Wolford’s words, “the neoliberal policy of market-led agrarian reform privileges

the status quo (supporting the owners who defend their right to land in part because they have land) rather than modifying the inequitable distribution of land" (p. 257). But, as restitution in Levubu, South Africa, also indicates, the notion that neoliberal influences are completely dominant has to be questioned. In Levubu the state's approach to settling restitution claims has entailed a more interventionist stance that reflects the state's attempt to become the guardian of land-reform beneficiaries (Fraser 2007a); departures from the neoliberal-style MLAR model can therefore lead to hybrid approaches to land reform.

If two areas of interest in the literature are notions of community and the influence of neoliberalism on land reform, nowhere near as much has been said about the impact on/of land reform of/on gender relationships. This is definitely not to suggest that gender relationships have been ignored in geographical studies of land reform. Haripriya Rangan and Mary Gilmartin, for example, use a range of materials to provide a detailed account and incisive critique of the place of women's rights in South Africa's land reform (2002). They cite in particular a "Constitution contradiction" that simultaneously accords equal rights to men and women and endorses traditional customary rule that facilitates discrimination against women in the former homeland areas. Goebel also addresses the place of women amid land reform in Zimbabwe (2005). A special issue of the *Journal of Agrarian Change* (republished as *Agrarian Change, Gender and Land Rights* [Razavi 2003]), partly addressed gender relations, though not with a sufficient focus on their geographical dimensions. Future research would do well to further correct this lacuna.

ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR FUTURE GEOGRAPHICAL WORK ON LAND REFORM

Land reform is indeed a "many-splendored thing" (Wolford 2007). Its study necessarily demands consideration of abstract concepts such as politics and the state, accumulation and the market, human interactions with nonhuman actors and objects, subject formation, culture, and representation. Attention to all of these issues demands a type of analysis that places them in their broader geohistorical context. Geographers should be well placed to achieve effective results in the study of land reform. They should bring to studies of land reform a heightened degree of sensitivity to space and place—two key concepts in understanding the geohistorical contexts of land-reform efforts. Geographers are trained to "think geographically," the practice of which demands a particular type of intellectual rigor stemming from geography's ontological basis and which is markedly different from other branches of the academy, including those disciplines with longer traditions of contributing to the literature on land reform. Geographical thinking entails recognizing, acknowledging, and theorizing unevenness, differences across space, and the range of intersections and crosscutting social relationships that connect people and places. Arguably, land reform is best comprehended when it is viewed geographically. Toward deepening geography's engagement with land reform, therefore, I underpin the following points, which are intended to generate discussion and/or debate, with the question of whether the geography-of-land-reform literature has any sort of future.

One issue to consider here is land reform's peculiarity. Land reform is by no means a measure that all states pursue; nor are we likely to find bottom-up land-reform approaches everywhere. Land reform is peculiar, then, insofar as it is unlike policies that relate to the macroeconomy (trade, investment, taxation) or social welfare (housing, education, health), which almost all states must develop. Land reform is, in short, a contingency. It arises out of juxtapositions, unexpected or "thrown-together" combinations and interrelationships (Massey 2005). Histories and political struggles, revolutions, independence movements and a range of outside interferences must be considered. Noting land reform's peculiarity in this way need not clash with Marxist perspectives, which suggest that eradicating predatory, precapitalist landed property is a necessary precondition for a transition to capitalism. Land reform is by no means the only way in which such a transformation can occur. Conditions in India, say, or Bangladesh, never mind England, indicate that land reform is neither necessary for achieving that change nor, perhaps, even likely to achieve it. For it to occur, political or economic pressures must be present; we would not be justified in expecting land reform to emerge—or, indeed, return—wherever land questions continue to rankle. All of this is to say that the peculiarity of land reform places limits on the capacity for research in what are often vastly different places to speak more generally about land-reform theory. For example, to what extent can research based on land reform in Scotland inform theorizations of land reform in, say, Brazil? Abstracting from the particularities or concrete conditions in one land-reform arena with a view to developing a more general understanding about how land reform will occur in other arenas poses considerable, if not insurmountable, challenges. At issue here are questions about the practice of generating theories regarding apparently general processes based on understandings of vastly different concrete situations. Although significant benefits might accrue if geographers were to develop a broader, more general set of theories or understandings about land reform, agreement on what precisely should be their foundations seems unlikely, given the quite different sorts of places in which geographers conduct their research. Perhaps peculiarity helps explain the limited extent to which the geographical literature on land reform has developed as such.

A second point here has to do with how land reform unfolds. As Henry Bernstein notes, states—or, indeed, social movements—can pursue it in a variety of ways (2002). Similarly, land reform in any one place will occur relative to a wide range of geohistorical conditions in that place, never mind wider circuits, flows, or networks of capital, ideas, or people. In other words, any geography-of-land-reform research will entail complex processes unfolding in relation to place-specific conditions and all-important matters of context, including conditions, processes, opportunities, and constraints not of the choosing of those who conduct it. Such an uneven—and pliable—terrain also poses challenges for theorizations that seek to uncover iron laws about the geography of land reform. Partly for this reason, geographers may be best advised to use the plural: geographies of land reform. What this point means for theorizing land reform is that the geographically uneven way in which top-down

land reform unfolds within the territorial boundaries of the state should not be overlooked. Neither should the uneven geographies of more bottom-up forms of land reform. Asking about geographical unevenness can be a useful first step in finding something unusual, something that promises positive returns. Local specificities of land reform deserve our attention, as Lunstrum and Perramond illustrate (both 2008).

A third point relates to what dimensions or dynamics of land reform geographers should prioritize. As the work of Henry Bernstein, Saturnino Borrás Jr., or, indeed, Wendy Wolford makes clear, focusing on or prioritizing the material dimensions of agrarian struggle and land reform is widespread (Bernstein 2002; Borrás 2003, 2005; Wolford 2007). Geography, of course, has a range of guiding concepts for engaging with materialist approaches, as excellently laid out by David Harvey (2001), in particular; thinking geographically about capitalism, as Harvey's more recent concept of "accumulation by dispossession" makes clear (2003), can be illuminating. But while it is one thing to highlight the benefits of adopting a materialist approach in geography, it is quite another to suggest that all geography must prioritize the material. In short, geographical studies of land reform need not be restricted to materialist approaches. Unfortunately, at least as I see it, there is somewhat of a dearth of geographical studies of land reform that take issues of subject formation or the politics of difference as seriously as material issues. Yet Goebel's work, which emphasizes the impact of land reform on gender relationships and vice versa (2005; see also Walker 2003), indicates the potential for research that examines how land-reform processes interact with other politics of difference, including issues of identity and subject formation. Outside geography, moreover, interrelationships among land, land reform, and subject formation have been a persistent theme (for a recent example, see James 2007). A frontier of geographical scholarship regarding land reform might therefore entail examinations of how the politics of land reform is also a politics of difference.

Another option might be for geographers to return to and further develop the two straddling themes—community and neoliberalism—identified above. The latter, of course, is a hot topic across contemporary geography, although for how much longer is unclear. As a consequence of doubt about its more general applicability, it might be best for geographers to consider focusing more closely on the former. Communities in land-reform contexts are groups of individuals who either pursue land or assume control of land. How those communities operate internally is an obvious question of considerable significance, given the difficulties that many land-reform beneficiaries face in managing land or sharing any costs or benefits. Other questions might involve how differentiation occurs among community members via networked relationships with actors outside the community or how the definition or organization of particular land-reform communities facilitates or hinders relationships with the state or with other institutions. The guiding practical or policy question might be, What are the costs or benefits of community landownership or land management under land-reform efforts? More abstractly, scholars in the geog-

raphy-of-land-reform literature might explore the possibility of examining the spatial politics of community formations in relation to “hot” concepts in the discipline, such as geographical scale and social networks.

Thinking more strategically now, how might the discipline begin to consolidate and capitalize on geographers’ interest in land reform? The scope for geography to position itself as a leading player here is significant, I would suggest. Perhaps one solution is for geographers who study land reform to begin networking and pooling their efforts. Forming a specialty group of the Association of American Geographers might be one way forward; another possibility is for geographers with a mutual interest in land reform to come together in a conference and deliberate where their collective efforts—in terms of both concepts and requests for funding—might best be directed. Whatever the specific technique, my argument in this article is that a strategic stance is needed to move research agendas forward and address the pressing questions raised by the reemergence of land reform. At issue is interdisciplinary competition within the academic division of labor for scarce resources, prestige, and claims of authority. Geography has much more to offer.

One obstacle here is the limited extent to which the various contributors to the literature explicitly communicate with one another. A striking—and highly problematic—feature of the geographical literature on land reform is that the range of contributors I have mentioned rarely cite one another’s work. The various scholars are, perhaps unwittingly, developing the geographical literature on land reform, but they certainly do not seem to identify with it as such. Adequately addressing why this occurs is beyond the scope of this article. Tentatively, I would suggest that the contributors tend to communicate the significance of their work to research in other disciplines rather than to the small group of geographers explicitly interested in land reform. But in the light of what I believe is a fledgling literature, I would argue that contributors should begin to purposely develop it. In so doing, steps might be made toward expanding the general yet by no means glib point that geography matters to the way in which land reform occurs. What geographers refer to as a “sensitivity to space” would, I suggest, improve understanding of unfolding situations in places such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, or Brazil, where geography is fundamentally at issue in the way land reform unfolds.

It is worth emphasizing here, therefore, that a more positive aspect of the multidisciplinary nature of the geographical literature on land reform is its methodological versatility. I have cited examples of a range of methodological approaches that some geographers might say is quite typical of what they can bring to the study of land reform. For example, and as McCusker has demonstrated (2004), innovative approaches to understanding what happens during land reform can entail combining remote-sensing techniques with on-the-ground and more qualitative methods such as interviews with land-reform beneficiaries. The robust mixed-methods approach of Benjaminsen and his colleagues also deserves highlighting here (2006). And geographers have taken an active role in developing highly imaginative, mixed-methods research on land struggles in Brazil (Simmons and others 2007). Clearly,

geographers are approaching the study of land reform with creative ideas and rigorous methods. In the context of ever-increasing demands for interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary studies, geography is well positioned to take the lead in shaping future research. One of geography's strengths is precisely the degree to which active researchers are positioned to develop mixed-methods approaches that address multiple, closely related questions in innovative ways. Future collaborations should be on the agenda.

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