Pro-Poor Land Reform

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The Philippine government has claimed great success in its land redistribution program. This claim is rejected and dismissed by critics who argue that nothing significant has been achieved by the state land reform. Meanwhile, various international development institutions have moved on to launch large-scale market-oriented land policies including the formalization of private property rights over land resources, alongside the so-called market-led agrarian reform model. These initiatives have been questioned widely by critics. Indeed in recent years there has been a worldwide revival of interest in the issue of land — land reform, land policies, property rights — but in significantly different ways than the previous initiatives around land reform. It is within this general global and national political context that I embarked on the research that has led to the publication of this book. The principal motivation for me was political: to get a good sense of the debates on land reform and peasant movements in the Philippines and act accordingly in order to contribute to peasant struggles for land and democracy. The subsequent research undertaking has necessarily brought me deeper into the peasant communities across the country, while at the same time it has pushed me to take a broader perspective worldwide. The same political challenge has required a rigorous academic research discipline; and fortunately the latter was provided by my doctoral studies at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Hague.

The fieldwork for this study is comprised of both formal/structured and informal/unstructured elements. The former pertains to my official affiliation with the ISS as a doctoral student, with scholarship support from the Netherlands Fellowship Programme (NFP). Under this program I conducted an intensive year of field research in the Philippines during the period 2001–
2002. The latter spans a much longer period of time, stretching far back into the early 1980s (when I was just starting my activist involvement with the peasant movement in the Philippines) and extending up to the present (during my regular field research trips to the Philippines involving a variety of other intellectual and political undertakings). It is important to note that while in the process of constructing a coherent dissertation, I started to develop the component parts of the thesis, and several of these parts have been published in academic journals. Throughout all these processes and during this entire period, as can well be imagined, I became indebted to so many institutions and individuals who, in a variety of ways, have assisted and inspired me to persist in this study. I wish to thank all of them here — but of course it is not possible to name them all. I trust that they all know how grateful I am to them. I will simply mention a few individuals and institutions:

I would like to thank the NFP for the generous support extended to me to carry out my doctoral studies and research. I also thank the Rural Development, Environment and Population Studies Group (RDEPS) at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) for providing me with a job, an office space, and logistical support that enabled me to carry out a number of research initiatives and at the same time revise my dissertation, prepare the manuscript for this book, and go through the process of publishing this book. More particularly, I thank the “land research group” at RDEPS for its financial support to the later phase of this book project — and by implication, the land research group’s funders: the Inter-Church Organization for Development and Cooperation (ICCO), Cordaid, Oxfam Novib, and the Belgian 11.11.11.

I would like to thank several academic journals and publishers for allowing me to publish my articles, or parts of them, in this book: Development and Change, Journal of Agrarian Change, Journal of Development Studies, Journal of International Development, Review of International Political Economy, European Journal for Development Research, Critical Asian Studies, and Progress in Development Studies; the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD), the Transnational Institute (TNI), and FoodFirst Books. And I would also like to thank the Ateneo de Manila University Press, which is publishing my two volume book on agrarian reform, rural development, and social movements: There are several overlapping chapters between this current book and those two volumes, although they are significantly different.

There are several key intellectual influences on this book that I would like to acknowledge and thank, without of course attributing to them my final analysis or the errors that may remain in this work.
I am extremely grateful to Ben White and Cris Kay — my dissertation supervisors, who provided me with intellectual guidance and inspiration, allowing me space for my own exploration and innovation while providing constant reminders of the requisites of proper research. Their critical comments and helpful suggestions saved this study from embarrassing mistakes and greatly improved the quality of its arguments.

I am deeply indebted as well to Danilo Carranza, Jonathan Fox, Jennifer Franco, Ron Herring, James Putzel, and Manuel “Steve” Quiambao for their varying intellectual inputs to this study. James and Ron made their contribution by reading and commenting on several other related papers, in addition to their official task as members of the examination committee of my dissertation. I am also grateful to Rosanne Rutten, Bridget O’Laughlin, Otto van den Muijzenberg, and Erhard Berner — all of whom were involved in the process of my thesis writing and defence, providing much needed intellectual assistance and raising critical and challenging questions.

I am also grateful to my other teachers and colleagues at ISS, some of whom I have already mentioned above: Haroon Akram Lodhi, David Dunham, Cris Kay, Wicky Meynen, Eric Ross, Ashwani Saith, Antonella Sorrentino, Max Spoor, Ben White, and Marc Wuyts. They have provided me with an inspiring and stimulating intellectual community and have been extremely supportive to my research projects during my stay at ISS. I also thank many former fellow doctoral students as well as the Filipino community at the ISS with whom I shared great intellectual and personal experiences.

As mentioned earlier, several parts of this book have been published in a number of journals and as chapters in books. In the process of these publications, I became indebted to several people for giving their comments and suggestions on how to improve my draft papers. Of course many of these people were anonymous, especially the reviewers; I thank them anyway. But several people were known to me — and I thank them here: Walden Bello, Henry Bernstein, Paula Bownas, Terry Byres, Dominique Caouette, the late Ranjit Dwivedi, Tom Fenton, Tim Forsyth, John Gershman, Krishna Ghimire, Paolo Groppo, John Harriss, Frank Hirtz, Peter Houtzager, Ben Kerkvliet, Hans Meliczek, Sarah O’Byrne, Joel Rocamora, Sergio Sauer, and David Wurfel.

Three parallel intellectual initiatives were going on at the time when I was revising the manuscript for this book. The first one was the Land Reform, Poverty Reduction and Public Action joint research by the ISS and UNDP. It brought together more than a dozen scholars to study and compare lessons from ten developing and transition countries. The debates, discussions, and exchanges of information and ideas were so rich and insightful and have
benefited this book in so many ways. I am grateful to all my fellow workshop participants in this project, especially Terry McKinley. The other initiative was the Citizen Engagement in National Policy Change. Sponsored by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Sussex, the project brought together eight scholars to study different experiences of state–civil society interactions in eight countries. Many of the ideas from the series of brainstorming sessions in this research were very useful in sharpening the arguments of this book. I would like to thank my fellow workshop participants in this project, especially John Gaventa, Gary Hawes, and Mark Robinson. Finally, this book benefitted so much from my deep involvement in the preparation for and in the actual conduct of the International Conference on Land, Poverty, Social Justice and Development at the ISS in The Hague in January 2006, which brought together more than three hundred scholars, peasant leaders, civil society activists, and development policy experts from all over the world. The exchanges of information and heated debates in this conference have enhanced my knowledge about other experiences outside the Philippines as well as new theoretical thinking related to land policies.

Moreover, I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for the University of Ottawa Press (UOP) for their critical but very useful comments and suggestions to the final draft of the book manuscript. I also thank Eric Nelson and Marie Clausén at UOP for their support and assistance with this project, as well as Trish O’Reilly for her excellent copy-editing work.

Political discussions with activists and development practitioners in the Philippines and internationally have equally been helpful in this study. It might require several pages to list all the organizations and people who have, one way or another, helped in this process, so I will list here just a few special ones: Armin Paasch and Sofía Monsalve at the FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN); Evert de Boer at the Filipijnen Groep Nederland (FGN), and Malu Padilla of Bayanihan in Utrecht; fellow development practitioners at ICCO; friends and comrades at the Transnational Institute (TNI) and XminY both in Amsterdam and at 11.11.11 in Brussels.

To friends and comrades at the PEACE Foundation, UNORKA, PARRDS, Padayon, MFDC, and AFRIM — it is too risky to name names, because I’m sure I will miss several: I am deeply indebted to all of them for their friendship and solidarity, patience and support all these years. In countless ways they have helped facilitate my fieldwork and my access to key social movement information and have provided constant inspiration.

I also thank all those who agreed to be interviewed for this study — and as can be seen from the list of interviewees in the references, there are many of
them. I was tempted many times to name a few of them here, but I could not
decide whom to select: the top officials who gave me rare insiders’ views or the
rank and file DAR officials who provided me critical front-line information;
a famous peasant leader or an ordinary land claim-maker? It is not easy to
choose. In the end, I decided not to name names.

Finally, I thank my long-time intellectual collaborator, critic, fellow activist
and best friend Jennifer Franco for all her great input to this research and for
her patience, understanding, and self-sacrifice during the long years of my
doctoral studies.

_Salamatunon tabi sa iyo intero!_