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BOOK REVIEWS

Adam Ashforth. *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. 2005. 396 pp.

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I must admit, I started off determined not to like this book. Firstly, I found Ashforth's previous work, *Madumo a Man Bewitched* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press and Cape Town, David Philip, 2000), to be superficial and self-promoting on the part of its author. Secondly, I am deeply sceptical of scholars from overseas who find it necessary to begin their works by expounding on the degree to which they have become 'sons' and 'brothers' to African families (p. ix). Despite the degree to which they may become embroiled in the daily lives of their 'informants', the latter remain just that. Admittedly, the researchers may develop close relationships with, and a genuine empathy for, these cultural brokers and interpreters. However, out of their fieldwork periods, they return home to their lives and families in the United States or in Europe. Africa is so far away. Now acknowledged 'experts' on Africa, they interpret 'us'– the African 'other' – for their 'home' audiences. They may try to suspend disbelief and understand what they call 'witchcraft', and explore its consequences, while doing fieldwork. However, on their return to the States or Europe, they do not have to live with the local consequences of the perceived forces of evil that they write about. Admittedly, their informants may have been 'bewitched'. These informants may have been the targets of gossip, or been drawn into accusations and counter accusations of 'witchcraft'. However, it is not the close friends, peers and students of the visiting academics who are affected, either as victims or avengers. At the end of their fieldwork, they leave and go back home. Maybe they return again for a further research period, or a number of further fieldwork periods. However, they always leave Africa – their 'research field' – to return 'home' where real-life (and their 'serious' academic work) happens.

Having said all of that, I found *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa* – a work which 'emerges in large part from the experiences documented in *Madumo*' (p. xiii) – exceptionally interesting and well-written. Adam Ashforth first visited Soweto in 1990, intending to focus his research 'upon the politics of representation in a transition to democracy' (p. x). In doing so, for the first time in his life, he found himself living in 'a world where people were presumed to have capacities for causing harm to others by supernatural means', where 'people … feared sickness and death by witchcraft' and where friends

were 'accused of killing others by witchcraft.' Never before had he had someone he 'loved hounded to an untimely death as a witch', or 'been a subject of witchcraft' himself (pp. xii-xiii). These issues became 'particularly pressing' for him on his return to Soweto in 1997. This was when he found his adoptive 'brother', Madumo, 'in a crisis of witchcraft' (p. xiii). Shortly after the death of his mother in the previous year, in response to accusations levelled by Zionist prophets, Madumo had been accused by his younger brother of being responsible for her death through 'witchcraft'. Having financed Madumo's quest for a cure, and with his informed consent, Ashforth documented this process in *Madumo*. Since then, he has obviously done a lot more thinking and a lot more research. In doing so, and in producing a far more conventionally academic text than *Madumo*, he has set out to take seriously (in other words, treat 'as literal statements) propositions about witchcraft' (p. xiv) that do not fit easily into his own secular humanist ideological background. It is in achieving this in engaging the central research question of 'What implications might this have for democratic governance within a modern liberal state?' (p. 11) that the strength of *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa* lies. As Ashforth points out to his global audience: 'their world is my world' (p. xi) and 'Africans living in a world of witches at the turn of the twentieth century also live in the same world as the rest of us – whoever we might be' (p. 316).

The work is divided into three parts. The first of these (pp. 7-130) engages what Ashforth calls 'the social dimensions of spiritual insecurity in Soweto at the turn of the twenty-first century' (p. 1). Here he shows how the fears, doubts and dangers arising from the perception of exposure to invisible evil forces are interlinked with other spheres of insecurity in daily life in the community at this particular time. These insecurities are the product of forces such as political instability and violence accompanying the death of the apartheid regime and in the birth of a new democratic society; the perceived escalation of criminal activity accompanying the process of transformation; poverty, the changing divisions of wealth and increasing socioeconomic inequality in the transforming society; and disease (particularly the spread of the HIV-AIDS pandemic). The section concludes with an examination of the implications of 'witchcraft' beliefs in this modern, urban setting. Contemporary Sowetans, he argues, suffer the consequences of spiritual insecurity in ways which have a life and reality, a dynamism, of their own. This, he argues, exposes the limitations of standard anthropological, and other approaches which analyse 'witchcraft' beliefs in terms of the concepts of 'rationality' and 'modernity'. If we are to understand them, we can only do so in terms of their success in answering the 'why me?' and 'why now?' questions for which Western science has no answers.

Part two (pp. 133-239) investigate the ways in which the contemporary inhabitants of Soweto interpret and deal with the invisible forces which, in their experience, act upon their lives. Looking at spirits and other invisible beings,

persons, images, objects and substances (especially, but not exclusively, *muthi*), Ashforth illuminates 'how everyday statements about witchcraft and other forms of harm involving invisible forces can be taken by reasonable people living in the modern world as plausible accounts of reality' (p. 2). He continues by examining issues of pollution and their association with death. According to Ashforth, these issues are central to any understanding of the stigma and denial surrounding AIDS. In following through the notion of spiritual insecurity, he also explores the role played by colonial conquest, urbanisation, transformations of kinship structures, Christian Evangelisation and African Initiated Churches (AICs) in perpetuating insecurity or attempting to bring about spiritual security. The chapter ends with an examination of what Ashforth calls the 'vulnerabilities of the soul that complicate issues of personal responsibility and individual autonomy' arising from 'the pervasive spiritual insecurity of everyday life' (p. 2).

Part three (pp. 243-318) examines the suppression of indigenous judicial procedures aimed at dealing with managing the problem of 'witchcraft' in African communities from colonial times. Discussion of the response of the post-apartheid government to issues of spiritual insecurity includes a reading of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as a failed witch-hunt. Arguing that these matters provide a serious challenge to the legitimacy of the democratic state, Ashforth concludes this section with an examination of the history of attempts to eradicate 'witchcraft' beliefs through African education in South Africa, and current efforts to redesign the curriculum.

There are two appendices. The first (pp. 319-323) is a brief excursus on the literature on Soweto and the second (pp. 325-329) is a transcription of 'The Thohoyandou Declaration on Ending Witchcraft Violence, Issued by the Commission on Gender Equality', of 10 September 1998.

For me, one of the great strengths of the books lies in the fact that Ashforth has chosen to ground his study in a contemporary urban context. Most studies of 'witchcraft' in South Africa are based in rural communities. This makes it easy to see beliefs and actions as somehow being removed from the socio-political centre of the country – cultural 'survivals' among less-sophisticated and less-connected rural people. Ashforth firmly turns this notion on its head, demonstrating that it is very much an issue at the centre of modern city life. Gossip, jealousy and malice – the classic triggers of 'witch-craft' accusations – are present in all societies, both rural and urban. Indeed, they are often both more prevalent, and more hidden – and hence more 'secret' and dangerous – in cities than in the rural areas. Similarly, pride is as much of a 'magnet for witchcraft' in the towns as in the rural areas.

Ashforth manages to explore these issues in a way which does not exoticise belief and action. 'Most of the time, people in Soweto live in their bodies in ordinary sorts of ways' that sceptical outsiders would not find 'outlandish' (236). Recourse to beliefs about 'witchcraft', and taking action in terms of these

beliefs, is simply one way, among a multiplicity of others, of looking at the world and acting to bring security in a fundamentally insecure situation. Just as a car can be hijacked, so one's mind may be hijacked by *muthi* (p. 227). On a broader level, it is possible to describe TRC as a (failed) witch-hunt (pp. 270ff.). Ashforth situates his argument about these issues in the wider context of violence in Soweto and in South Africa generally – the bitterness in the heart which is the legacy of apartheid and the pervasive sense of social injustice that continues, and has been heightened, in the post-apartheid period. When the community do not trust the police, or the wider judicial system, to protect them against physical and mystical violence, they are forced to turn elsewhere for security. 'Witchcraft' accusations and witch-hunts are not the only solutions adopted. Indeed, they often form only part of the complex of actions undertaken by people to cope with the stresses, strains and uncertainties of daily life. Vigilantism, street committees, African Initiated Churches and the so-called 'mainline' (Protestant, Catholic and Pentecostal) churches all have a role to play. People may even turn to the law to deal with the symptoms, rather than the underlying causes, of insecurity. Whether we explain them in terms of 'witchcraft' or other terms, the dangers and insecurities of life in contemporary Soweto (and in the wider South Africa) are real. In fact, 'witchcraft' accusations are often the exception, rather than the rule. They provide a subtext - often exposed only through gossip, innuendo or joking behaviour - which underlies other methods of attempting to deal with violence, insecurity and danger. In many ways, 'people talk about witchcraft least when it matters the most' (p. 313).

Ashforth premises his analysis of spiritual insecurity, the core support of his argument, 'upon a presumption of malice underpinning community life.' This he describes 'as a negative corollary of the doctrine of *ubuntu*'. Where 'the philosophy of *ubuntu* proclaims that "a person is a person through other persons," everyday life teaches that life in a world of witches must be lived in terms of a presumption of malice that adds: *because they can kill you*' (pp. 1 & 86).

At first, this left me with the uneasy feeling that he was returning to some kind of colonial mindset where Africans were seen as suffering from spiritual insecurity because they did not worship the 'true God'. However, as his argument develops, it is clear that the insecurity that he is referring to is that which drives all of us to seek solutions to the threats and uncertainties that we encounter in our daily lives, and to give meaning to our lives. For Ashforth, all our precepts upon which we have been content to live our lives 'in a world without witches are demonstrably as baseless as those supporting' the residents of twenty-first century Soweto 'as they make their way through witch-ridden worlds.' For Ashforth though, 'it is better to live in a world without witches.' Liberation from 'the reality of invisible evil forces leaves … [us] free in important material ways'. However, such 'freedom is a luxury … predicated on

security', a security which is at present absent for many of the people of South Africa (p. 317). This is an interesting contribution to our understanding of not only Soweto but all of us and our inner – and external – demons.

As is to be expected, there are some things that I would have like to have seen done differently. Firstly, I feel strongly that the work would have benefited from a stronger comparative perspective. Many of the themes which emerge from the book are reflected in the works of authors such as Peter Geschiere, Wim van Binsbergen, Clifford Geertz and Terence Ranger in other parts of Africa. Ashforth's exploration of 'spiritual insecurity' could only have been deepened by comparison with their works, many of which (with the exception of those of Ranger) appear in the bibliography in any case. I would also have liked to have seen more of a dialogue with authors working within South Africa, such as Isak Niehaus and Edwin Ritchken.

Secondly, I do not think that Ashforth has adequately established the connection between 'witchcraft' and national-level politics. It is debatable whether or not a significant number of people actually expect the state to actively provide them with protection against metaphysical violence. Certainly, there are a considerable number of people who would like the Witchcraft Suppression Act to be scrapped and who would welcome new legislation which would enable them to retaliate against assaults by 'witches'. However, I would argue that it is unlikely that people expect the state to provide them with the means of doing this – what they seek is the freedom to consult indigenous specialists in these matters.

Thirdly, Ashforth specifically states that he will not 'presume to dispense policy advice on how to deal with' the problem of spiritual insecurity 'other than to point out that it informs virtually every aspect of social life and thus impinges on virtually every aspect of politics' (p. 19). Given the crucial role that this concept plays in his argument, and his assertions about the failure of the post-apartheid state to deal with issues of spiritual insecurity, this is a serious omission. One would certainly have liked to have seen thorough discussion of possible scenarios for consideration in tackling the problem. More detailed discussion of attempts to deal with problems arising out of witchcraft beliefs and accusations through education would also have been extremely useful.

Fourthly, I feel that Ashforth has paid insufficient attention to the relationship between 'witchcraft' and HIV-AIDS. He certainly refers to it, and sees it as being extremely important (see especially pp. 9, 18, 45, 81, 91-92, 106, 108-110 & 154-156). However, in a previous article, he suggested that this epidemic would stimulate a parallel epidemic of 'witchcraft' accusations ('An Epidemic of Witchcraft? The Implications of AIDS for the Post-Apartheid State', *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002, pp. 121-143). Not only does he seem to downplay this controversial but interesting idea in the present work, he also

fails to provide an in-depth analysis of those who attribute HIV-Aids to 'witchcraft', and why they do so.

Fifthly, I feel that 'zombies' – people magically killed and transformed into slaves by 'witches' do not receive sufficient attention in the text (pp. 41-42, 277 & 234-235). For me, dehumanised, enslaved people doing the bidding of their owners are an incredibly powerful symbol of the alienation and exploitation of dependent wage labourers, and the proletariat in general, under capitalism. Ashforth mentions their existence but does not unpack their meaning in enough detail.

Sixthly, Ashforth mentions the generational conflicts involved in contemporary witch-hunts. In the past, these were under the control of the 'kings and chiefs' and actions were taken by the elders of the community. Recognised judicial procedures and channels of appeal were in place. Today they are often a form of mob-action under the control of youths. There is arguably a greater potential for witch-hunts escalating out of control than was the case in the past (pp. 256ff). It is a pity that Ashforth did not develop these themes more fully.

Lastly, the terms 'witches' and 'witchcraft' are highly problematic. They carry a western cultural baggage which frequently obscures what local people mean when they use them. In my own work, I escape this problem by using the local terms for these beliefs and practices. In the polyglot Soweto, Ashforth is unable to take this course of action. One would nevertheless have liked a through discussion on problems of definition and usage in the preface or the introductory chapter.

Despite these omissions, and having come a full circle from my starting point, I heartily recommend this book for the specialist, and more general, reader on 'witchcraft', religion, legislative reform, socioeconomic inequalities, violence and insecurity in South Africa.

Lungisile Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of Land in South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006. 326 pp.

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Those of you who have not yet read this outstanding work should not waste time reading the review but should rush out and buy it immediately. A substantially revised version of his 2002 doctoral thesis, Lungisile Ntsebeza has written a book on his home district of Xhalanga that deserves to be recognised as an instant classic.

Cala, the seat of the Xhalanga magistracy, is so far off the beaten track that it was the last of the 28 towns of the former Transkei to get its own tar road, and that was only in 2004. Its history has been similarly marginalised, being hidden even from Beinart and Bundy's *Hidden Struggles*. It has never been credited for the pivotal role it played in the battle against Bantu Authorities, although the resistance of Emnxe locality long preceded the famous Mpondo revolt of 1960. Yet among Xhosa-speaking people, Xhalanga is well-known as a cradle of intellectual and political ferment. It had a radical bookshop when it never had a bank. It had peasants but it never had mission schools. Xhalanga's more famous children include MK members Ezra Sigwela and Ambrose Makiwana, the first MK Chief of Staff; trade unionists Gwede Mantashe, Enoch Godongwana and the Mayekiso brothers; jurist Dumisa Ntsebeza and revolutionary martyr Bathandwa Ndondo gunned down in broad daylight in September 1985.

Lungisile Ntsebeza helps us to understand just how all this happened. The modern Xhalanga district was created in the aftermath of the Thembu rebellions of 1880 that divided western Thembuland into three parts: the white commercial farming district of Elliot; the traditional Thembu district of St Marks (Cofimvaba) dominated by the first Matanzima; and Xhalanga which the colonial government allocated as a buffer zone to loyal black peasants of mixed ethnic origins. The loyalty of the black landowners was as ephemeral as the Cape liberal era which sponsored them. They longed for what were called *embokotwa* titles, that is titles similar to those held by farmers in the neighbouring white district of Elliot. They rejected the inferior titles available to blacks, just as they rejected the inferior political representation available from the Glen Grey style native councils. These legitimate wishes were frustrated by white colonialism, and they changed sides. As Ntsebeza puts it, 'The people who were giving the government a hard time, and who were now being referred to as agitators, were eminent loyalists in the latter part of the nineteenth century'.

For eighty years, the people of Xhalanga fought these struggles without help or hindrance from traditional leaders. The royal families of Stokwe and Gecelo had been displaced in the original 1880 rebellion, and the headmen of the

district were mainly landowners who sympathised with the other landowners. But lurking in nearby Cofimvaba was Chief K. D. Matanzima whose ambition to become a Paramount Chief could only be realised if he extended chiefly control over Xhalanga. How he did so, in spite of the best efforts of the Xhalanga 'Jacobins', is related in the central section of this absorbing book. Here I can do no more than capture the flavour of the times by quoting Xhalanga's greeting to Matanzima and his fellow-chiefs in 1958, 'asifuni nkosi apha voortsek mnka naye, ukunya kwenkosi, umnqundu wenkosi' [we don't want a chief here, voetsak, take him away, shit of a chief, backside of a chief]. There was burning of huts, there were murders and deportations, but Proclamation 400 won out in the end. People in Xhalanga today will tell you that their district is undeveloped on account of their resistance to Matanzima. They are not complaining, it is something in which they take great pride.

Ntsebeza's narrative takes us to 1994 and beyond. His focus throughout is on traditional leaders and land matters but he pauses along the way to take in critical issues such as the political struggle between the ANC and the AAC (Unity Movement) in the 1950s, and the rivalry between Xhalanga's long-established NGO sector and ANC/SANCO/Union structures in the 1990s. Ntsebeza sees the ANC, after 'years of ambivalence and prevarication' as coming down on the side of the traditional leaders and fears a 'retribalisation', but his evidence in this regard is drawn mainly from the national scene. I was ANC member of the National Assembly for Xhalanga from 1994 to 1996, and I don't see it quite like that. I see something like a three-way clash between traditional leaders, progressive intellectuals and ANC functionaries entrenched in the Sakhisizwe Local Municipality. I see the Xhalanga traditional leaders benefiting not so much from national support but from the increasing disillusion of the masses with the delivery systems of the Local Municipality. I also see the Ntsebeza family featuring somewhere sometime, though not perhaps soon.

Lungisile says in a throwaway footnote that 'a detailed study of the politics of Xhalanga from the 1970s onwards warrants a book of its own which I am seriously considering'. That is something we can all look forward to. In the meantime, this one will do us very nicely.

Lungisile Ntsebeza and Ruth Hall (eds.), 2007. *The Land Question in South Africa – The Challenge of Transformation and Redistribution.* Cape Town. HSRC Press.

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The Land Question in South Africa is an excellent collection of insightful papers that focuses on the problems, challenges and possibilities for land reform in contemporary South Africa. Besides the introductory chapter written by the editors, the volume consists of eight chapters. Two chapters, written by Henry Bernstein and Sam Moyo, set the global and regional context for the six chapters on South Africa that follow. These latter chapters effectively entail, to use specific phrases from chapter titles, 'taking stock' of land reform (Ruth Hall) during the first post-apartheid decade and charting the way 'towards accelerated implementation' of reform (Rogier van den Brink et al.) over the next decade and beyond.

All chapters clearly indicate that the land reform programme has demonstrated only limited progress. From the evidence presented by the various contributors, the failure of the programme is particularly stark with reference to land redistribution and land tenure changes, and is less marked in the case of land restitution. Yet, according to Ntsebeza (p. 107), there seems to be 'no agreement on the reasons'. The causes underlying the truncated character of the programme – as propounded in the chapters – indeed represent a diverse mix, but it is questionable whether they are inherently incompatible with each other. The reasons include policy inconsistencies, fiscal and budgetary limitations, insufficient institutional capacity, lack of political will, resistance from white commercial farmers and, last but not least, the fact that 'the rural poor are weak and fragmented at this stage' (Andrews p. 216).

Ntsebeza's chapter is concerned in particular with a 'debate' about the significance of the South African constitution in inhibiting reform. He notes an inconsistency within the constitution between clauses that protect property rights and clauses that allow for expropriation under certain conditions. On this basis, he argues that the constitution acts as a brake on land acquisition for redistribution purposes. His main protagonist in this 'debate' appears to be his co-editor, who claims in her own chapter (and elsewhere) that 'the most immediate constraints … appear to be more political than legal' (Hall p. 99). In other words, the constitution does not simply set limits but also affords possibilities for acquisition, and the problem lies squarely and fairly at the feet of the sitting ANC government. It seems though that this 'debate', as currently

constructed, has the danger of degenerating into static conceptions of social possibilities; it downplays how this contradictory moment in the land reform initiative (which both writers capture) is played out in a contingent manner according to the shifting balance of political forces in South Africa. In this regard, the editors seem to patch things up in their introduction by agreeing that land reform is 'a fundamentally political project' (Hall and Ntsebeza p.20), and hence is an indeterminate project.

Hall's chapter though does not focus specifically on the 'debate', but involves a much broader review of the progress and challenges in the land reform process. Like other contributors, she emphasises the persistence of 'deeply etched racial and class divides in the countryside' (p. 103) and argues that the government's adherence to the willing seller-willing buyer principle serves only to entrench those divides by stymieing land acquisition. She implies that this persistence is consistent with the predominant neo-liberal thrust in South Africa. In this context, she makes the critical point that even if more far-reaching redistribution was to take place, 'the prospects of a successful smallholder farming sector' in post-resettlement areas would likely 'recede' (p. 100) due to insufficient state support arising from the liberalisation of the agricultural regime under the impact of the neo-liberal trajectory. Yet, underlying her analysis, and influencing much of the volume, is a linear model of policy formation and implementation which appears to measure reform progress 'against policy frameworks and targets' (p. 87). Problematically, this kind of analysis implies that policy simply exists to guide practices, and it fails to consider how policy models often arise to rationalise and legitimise existing practices. This means that 'progress' cannot be properly measured in terms of the distance between policy goals and policy effects. Insofar as policy goals form part of a broadly accepted and coherent land programme, and insofar as this programme is repeatedly confirmed through even non-transformative practices, then 'success' has been 'achieved'.

In her thoughtful chapter, Cheryl Walker seeks to transcend idealised notions of land reform, including 'nostalgia and romantic identity politics' (p. 146) and the 'inflated expectations' (p. 134) that 'redistributive' programmes (including restitution and tenure changes) may have on rural livelihoods. Her long involvement in the land 'sector' (pre-dating the post-apartheid period) may in part explain her pragmatic realism that suggests that in 'insisting on all possible targets, we advance none' (p. 132). She argues that the demands for historical redress may not necessarily translate into best development practices for the future, and she goes on discuss priorities for the state that are – relatively speaking – achievable and worth pursuing. These include the finalisation of the restitution process, and targeted acquisition (if necessary, by expropriation) of land for development projects for the landless and land-short. Although her chapter is not 'an academic exercise' (p. 133), it nevertheless has analytical undertones. In this respect, one concern is her ongoing reference to the burden

of 'constraints' on land reform (pp. 133, 146), whether programmatic or non-programmatic in form. In political terms, just as an unbridled populist romanticism may lead to championing the cause of radical restructuring 'from below' at all costs, the over-privileging of constraints to land reform may lead to political conservatism. Intellectually, pragmatism is not far off from pessimism, and this may impact on the conceptual framework employed when analysing land reform; in particular, it downplays how constraints are in fact socially produced, reproduced *and* transformed.

The three chapters by Moyo, Mercia Andrews and Ben Cousins raise diverse points, but they are in agreement on a range of issues – some of which are shared by other contributors. More specifically, these three writers directly challenge the 'large farm' model of land efficiency propagated by commercial farmer organisations in South Africa (and more widely in the sub-region) and seemingly accepted (if only passively) by the ANC government. They thus emphasise the need for large-scale land redistribution and the importance of the 'small farmer development trajectory' (Moyo p. 61). In Cousins' words, this entails a 'new' class of emergent petty commodity producers' emerging 'from within ranks of the desperately poor' (p. 232). Although not a central point in his chapter, Bernstein (p. 48) makes the telling point that, in any analysis, 'scale in agriculture' must be seen as embedded in 'specific, and variant, forms of social relations'. In line with this argument, converting large farms into small farms may simply replace racial forms of agrarian injustice with the pronounced patriarchal biases that exist in small-scale farming throughout the sub-region. The 'new' class of petty commodity producers may be riddled with 'old' gender inequalities.

In arguing for the small farm option, Moyo, Andrews and Cousins are seriously concerned about the non-equity (racial) implications of converting customary land regimes into private freehold tenure as propagated by multi-lateral donor institutions. More generally, they argue against market-led land reform, in large part because it undermines the quest for 'redistributive justice' (Andrews p. 205). And they suggest that an interventionist state, or what Cousins (p. 233) calls a 'proactive state', is critical for ensuring significant land reforms. For Moyo, in particular, this would entail forcefully engaging with the national question as the 'racial foundations' of land reform strongly 'resonates' (p. 65) throughout southern Africa. Finally, all three chapters bring to the fore the significance of 'an organised movement that can drive policy reformulation' (Andrews p. 218). In the end, these writers still cling (some might say romantically) to the prospect of popular-driven state-facilitated land reform leading to successful small-scale farming, or what Bernstein disparagingly refers to as 'agrarian populism' (p. 43). Their arguments raise complex questions about the nation-state which are often left unaddressed in the literature on land reform. In the case of contemporary Zimbabwe – a society which seems fertile ground for some sort of theorising about the state – there is a

striking lacuna in this respect in the land reform literature and beyond. Certainly, claims about a more activist state need to be underpinned by nuanced conceptual and theoretical work.

A similar point pertains to the relation between state and society, and (in particular) the notion of 'transformation' that appears in the subtitle to the volume and in two of the chapter headings. There is considerable lack of clarity in the volume about what the term entails or what is to be transformed. This may be intentional, considering that transformation is an open-ended and contingent process. In this respect, the editors simply speak about a 'transformative vision' (p. 10). Transformation refers to social change, and underlying the various renditions of 'transformation' contained in the book are commitments regarding the form and content of change. The subtitle of the book links transformation to 'redistribution'. Clearly, for most of the contributors, transformation is a process that goes beyond redistribution and de-racialisation, and entails far-reaching change to the agrarian political economy (Walker pp. 142, 143). Moyo (p. 61) though expresses doubts about a 'gradualistic approach' to radical land reform. Likewise, van den Brink et al., note that significant land redistributions are 'most often done in periods of upheaval and political violence' (p. 162) yet they remain (romantically?) optimistic about the prospects for peaceful reform (p. 194) in South Africa. Like the 'state', the notion of societal 'transformation' requires serious methodological reflections.

I end this review with comments on what could likely be the two most controversial chapters in the book: by van den Brink et al., and Bernstein. The chapter by van den Brink et al., is controversial not only because of the message but also because of the messengers. The authors include Glen Sonwabo Thomas (Director-General of the Department of Land Affairs in the South African government) and Rogier van den Brink (Senior Economist in the World Bank). The chapter by van den Brink et al., is pushing a World Bank perspective, although not explicitly so. They perceive private property as the most modern form of landholding; the exception to the rule seems to prove that private property makes 'economic sense' (p. 161). Like other contributors to the book, they argue for the efficiencies of small-scale farming, or what they call 'family-sized' farms (p. 155).

The particular emphasis by van den Brink et al., is on the importance of land market forces and the need to unleash them more fully. For instance, in the case of land acquisition, they claim that land markets are distorted and 'need help' from the state (p. 167). This help would entail the removal of restrictions on land subdivisions and the raising of land taxes on unutilised commercial land, thereby facilitating access by the poor to small portions of land via the market if necessary financial assistance from the state is also forthcoming. The white commercial farming community[1] has recently expressed deep concern about such suggestions from what they (and probably others) perceive to be an unholy World Bank-government alliance. However, van den Brink et al., anticipated

such a reaction (pp. 185-186) and, in the end, they call for a 'policy framework which allows a menu of options to be pursued' (p. 193). On the other hand, the chapter appears far less sensitive to the kind of response that rural inhabitants might give to a market-led privatised land reform programme that may only further undermine and marginalise their livelihoods. One wonders whether land occupations and other forms of 'uncivil' action have a place in their broad 'policy framework'.

For some years now,[2] Bernstein has been proposing a reformulated agrarian question. He refers to the classic agrarian question as the 'agrarian question of capital' (specifically, of industrial capital) and he claims that, because the transition to capitalism has occurred globally, the 'question of capital' has been resolved at this level. Stalled capitalist industrialisation in the 'peripheries' has left the classic question unresolved in these regions but now largely redundant given the existence of industrial capitalism as an all-pervasive world-system. He claims that the agrarian question needs to be significantly re-conceptualised as an 'agrarian question of labour' in the light of the subordinated integration of the South and East in international commodity chains and markets under the neo-liberal regime. His revised analysis brings to the fore the 'fragmentation (or fracturing) of labour' in the 'peripheries', with 'ever more disparate combinations of wage- and self-employment (agricultural and non-agricultural petty commodity production)' as reproduction strategies (Bernstein 2003).

In the volume under review, Bernstein continues to pursue this argument, and it is also taken up by Cousins under the notion of the 'agrarian question of the dispossessed'. He applies Bernstein's classic and reformulated questions to *within* South Africa and specifically to the position of *agricultural* and not industrial capital. According to Cousins, the 'scale' and 'productive capacity' of capitalist agriculture in South Africa means that the question of capital has been resolved by 'accumulation from above' (p. 227) but the question of dispossession can only be resolved by 'accumulation from below' through the emergence of the 'new' petty commodity producers. In turn, and quite confusingly, the second resolution seems to undermine the first resolution as the small-scale producers invariably contest 'the monopolistic privileges of white/corporate farming' (p. 227). These arguments do not seem consistent with Bernstein's position – Bernstein seeks to transcend the 'internalist' (single social formation) problematic (p. 32) in his global analysis and, further, his prime focus is on the transition to industrial capitalism and not on the emergence and consolidation of capitalist agriculture.

Cousins's discussion though leads us to consider whether there may be blatant confusions or at least unclear formulations within Bernstein's own argument. In the past, insofar as capitalist agriculture facilitated industrialisation within a particular social formation, Bernstein argues that the agrarian question of capital 'subsumes that of labour' (p.32). And he claims that, currently, the agrarian question of labour is not subordinated 'to that of capital',

and this is 'manifested in struggles for land against "actually existing" forms of capitalist landed property' (p. 41). The exact status of 'capital' and 'labour' remains obscure. In speaking about the subordination or otherwise of the 'labour question', is Bernstein making a statement about the prevailing balance of class forces or about the class category to be privileged epistemologically when making sense of agrarian change? Given that 'capital' and 'labour' are relational terms and are constitutive of each other, is Bernstein not separating them out and reformulating the agrarian question un-dialectically? Does an emphasis on the global resolution of the classic agrarian question betray an insensitivity to the idea that all 'resolutions' have a variable local content? Most critically, Bernstein needs to justify why the agrarian question needs to be reformulated at all rather than abandoned altogether.

Despite the criticisms noted above, there is little doubt that this volume is an essential contribution to the debate about land reform in contemporary South Africa. The marked emphasis on the practicalities of advancing the land reform process in creative and fluid ways is likely the single most important contribution of this publication.

1. See *Farmer's Weekly*, 13 October 2006 and 20 October 2006.
2. See for instance: H. Bernstein, 2003, 'Land reform in southern Africa in world-historical perspective' in *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 30. No. 96; and H. Bernstein, 2005, 'Rural land and land conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa' in S. Moyo and P. Yeros, eds., 2005, *Reclaiming the Land: The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, London: ZED Books.

Linda Richter and Robert Morrell (eds.). *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*. Cape Town. HSRC Press. 2006.

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Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa is a book that is long overdue. For far too long men, as subjects of academic research and writing in South Africa, have suffered from what David Gilmore(1990:2) refers to as 'the taken for granted syndrome'. Admittedly, the study of men and masculinities in South Africa has slowly started to develop some momentum, with books such as *Changing Men in South Africa* (Morrell, 2001) providing some invaluable insights into the construction of masculinities in local contexts. There has however been precious little written about men in one of their most important roles as fathers. In a country where as many as '57 per cent of all children, and 63 per cent of African children specifically [have] fathers who [are] "absent" or deceased', the importance of looking at men in the role of father cannot be underestimated (Dorrit Posel and Richard Devey in Chapter 4 of *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa* p. 49).

The book's point of departure is that understandings of fatherhood, and the roles fathers play in a child's life, 'can and do change over time and according to context' (Morrell and Richter, 2006:1), depending on factors such as material resources, political climate and popular social discourse. The first section of the book deals with the central issues upon which the rest of the book builds. Robert Morrells chapter in the section somewhat broadly connects fatherhood with masculinity by arguing that fatherhood is not in fact a biological given, but rather something which is contested and understood based on what it means to be a man in a particular context. Francis Wilson then presents some of these contextual influences by stressing that poverty, often hand-in-hand with migrant labour and HIV/AIDS, has resulted in a 'dislocated social structure' (p.30), frequently resulting in fathers being unable to fulfil social and economic responsibilities to children.

The next section of the book then puts fatherhood in historical perspective by revealing how factors such as migrancy, institutionalisation and poverty have over more than half a century played a role in changing understandings of fatherhood as well as the roles these fathers play in the lives of children. Mamphele Ramphele and Linda Richter, for example, provide a brief but insightful look into how the lives of 16 children from New Crossroads in Cape Town were affected by economic and social deprivation linked to the absence of their fathers brought about by apartheid's legacy. Mark Hunter in his chapter then provides some tentative insights into why some Zulu men have abandoned

their 'social role of fatherhood' (p.100). He suggests that since the 1970s, increasing unemployment among Zulu men has led to the decline in their ability 'to meet accepted social roles of fatherhood' (p. 106). Their disempowerment has led in turn to changes in the construction of fatherhood that casts it in a negative light.

In the third section of the book, authors then critically examine how fatherhood is constructed in our minds and represented in the media, arguing amongst other things, that in order to change what it means to be a father we need to understand and change how fatherhood is represented. In her chapter Jeanne Prinsloo, for example, discusses how men in fathering roles are 'invisible in most media forms' (p. 139), with men being represented in 'macho roles in which force and violence frequently feature ...' (p.143). She shows how these representations are problematic as they provide inadequate reference points for 'how we expect fathers to be "good" fathers' (p.144). In contradistinction, Solani Ngobeni compellingly argues, through an analysis of John Singletons movie *Boyz n the Hood*, that by romanticising fatherhood in the media we run the risk of overemphasising the importance of fathers to the healthy development of children and in turn 'castigate' (p. 153) families headed by single mothers – the predominant family structure in South Africa. Perhaps the most interesting contributions to the section, provided by Desmond Lesejane and Nhlanhla Mkhize, argue the case for using the image of fatherhood found in traditional South African culture to restore and redefine understandings of what it means to be 'father', understandings that were damaged by colonisation, migrant labour, apartheid and unemployment.

The penultimate section of the book endeavours to uncover what it means to be a father in South Africa today by discussing how fathers are positioned in relation to their children in terms of the law, the world of work and the effect of HIV/AIDS. Grace Khunou provides an impassioned critique of family law, by arguing that while fathers in South Africa have the obligation to pay maintenance, they still do not necessarily have concomitant rights to access their children. She then argues that this bias prevents many devoted fathers from developing essential relationships with their children. Marlize Rabe, using interview data, compares the role expectations of migrant and resident fathers working on a goldmine in Johannesburg, suggesting that, despite the absence of some fathers, being a good father for most of these men means more than simple economic provision. Finally, chapters by Chris and Cos Desmond and by Philippe Denis and Radikobo Ntsimane, discuss the immense social and economic impact of the high rate of absentee fathers in families affected by HIV/AIDS. They argue that in order for families, and children in particular, to cope with the pandemic, fathers need to become more emotionally and economically involved with their children.

Finally, the book outlines how programmes initiated both locally and abroad can help promote and support the role men can play as fathers in society. Dean

Peacock and Mbuyiselo Botha, for example, discuss what men can do to promote gender equality by becoming more involved in programmes which promote 'healthier and more responsible models of masculinity' (p.284). They then briefly examine how programmes such as the Men in Partnership Against Aids Programme (MIPAA) and the Men as Partners (MAP) Network have all played a role in promoting men's involvement in increasing gender equality. In the final chapter Tom Beardshaw, the Network Director of Fathers Direct in the United Kingdom, makes some qualified suggestions on how research, policy and programmes can be changed or enhanced to improve 'work with men in families' (p.306). As this brief tour of the contents of the book reveals, the issue of fatherhood in South Africa can be approached from many different angles. I however found that this has limited the impact of the collection somewhat. I found that I was left wanting more from the authors: more detailed data and analysis and chapters that were more clearly linked by a common thread. Much of what is presented in the book is tentative and some of the chapters fail to live up to their promise. These and other shortcomings of the book were probably unavoidable. The book is the first of its kind in South Africa and so it was bound to reflect a lack of research into fatherhood. What the book does do, however, is allude to some of the causes of the troubled, and all too often non-existent, relationships children have with their fathers. Therefore the book's value lies not in its ability to provide answers, but in its ability to raise some important questions. As such, it is a 'must read' for anyone interested in the frequently troubled nature of fatherhood in South Africa.

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