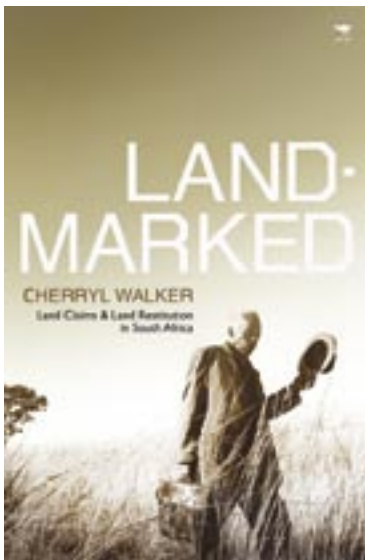


Landmarked

Land Claims and Land Restitution in South Africa

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Cherryl Walker
Jacana Media:
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When I purchased this book last year, I was glad to find an accessible, in-depth work on the absolutely crucial subject of land reform. Committing the error of “judging a book by its cover”, I assumed I would be reading a narrow-minded work of social justice rhetoric. I was mistaken. Walker draws on her capacities as a past Regional Land Claims Commissioner and a sociologist to deliver a pragmatic work that is relevant to scholars, policy makers and every South African with an interest in how our socio-political history is playing out in the spaces we share.

Through the use of three KwaZulu-Natal case studies – Cremin, Eastern Shores of St. Lucia and Cato Manor – she effectively illustrates just how convoluted the land reform process is, highlighting the interactions between bureaucratic and social institutions. The central tenet in the book is that what Walker terms the “master narrative” of land reform – the presupposition that social justice will be achieved through a “back to the land” mantra – fails to acknowledge the histories and evolving realities of many of the claimants. While land reform provides a form of

justice for the dispossessed and redress for land expropriation, it often obscures the fact that many claimants who seek justice do not necessarily want to return to the land. For many (as in Cremin), their lifestyles have changed dramatically since their removal and they cannot simply return to the land to satisfy an ideal model of loss and restoration. In addition, some spaces have competing claims from different groups where both have a legitimate stake (as in Cato Manor), and other areas may not be suitable for land reform due to environmental concerns or particular land use priorities (as in Eastern Shores). Walker also adds salient points that are eschewed by the rhetoric of social justice, such as ecological realities that determine agricultural potential or sustainability of settlements.

While the popular media focuses largely on rural land claims, Walker’s accounts of urban claims are enlightening. She provides statistics showing that urban claims vastly outnumber rural claims in many areas and that, for rural claims, the option of financial compensation is far more favoured than land restoration. This fact helps to debunk any myths that agrarian failure is a result of rampant or mishandled reform. These statistics also concisely summarise the successes, failures and status quo of land claims.

Landmarked effectively interweaves empirical evidence, the personal stories of people dispossessed from their land and Walker’s own reflections on the process and people she has worked with. The result is a book of undeniable honesty, fact-based evidence and rich in-depth analysis, and a hopeful, yet pragmatic, view of land reform in South Africa.



FOURTH
QUARTER 09

NEW AGENDA