

Market-Led Land Reform in Post-Apartheid Namibia

A Geography of Race and Class



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ABSTRACT

In Namibia, the land question remains high on the public agenda and a land reform programme is implemented since 1995. The reform attempts to the correction of racial imbalances in the access to land, and to alleviate poverty and dependency. The subject has been widely investigated, but little attention has been paid to the spatial depiction and analysis of the land property structure. This analysis covers every farm in the Otjozondjupa Region.

Data is disaggregated according to size and race, and the form of access to property acting as a proxy of class. The results of the investigation indicate that the “willing - seller - willing - buyer” mechanism is advancing a type of land reform which keeps a strong racial bias in the land property structure. Moreover, to the limited extent that the racial bias is being addressed, an overlapping class bias is developing strongly.

THE LAND REFORM PROCESS

Land reform in Namibia is based upon market principles, referred to as the “willing - seller - willing - buyer principle.” The 1991 National Land Conference dismissed the possibility of extensive land expropriations and ancestral land claims. There are three mechanisms of land redistribution in Namibia.

The first is the resettlement scheme. Government has a first option on every farm on sale. The land is allocated by a waiting list according to demand criteria.

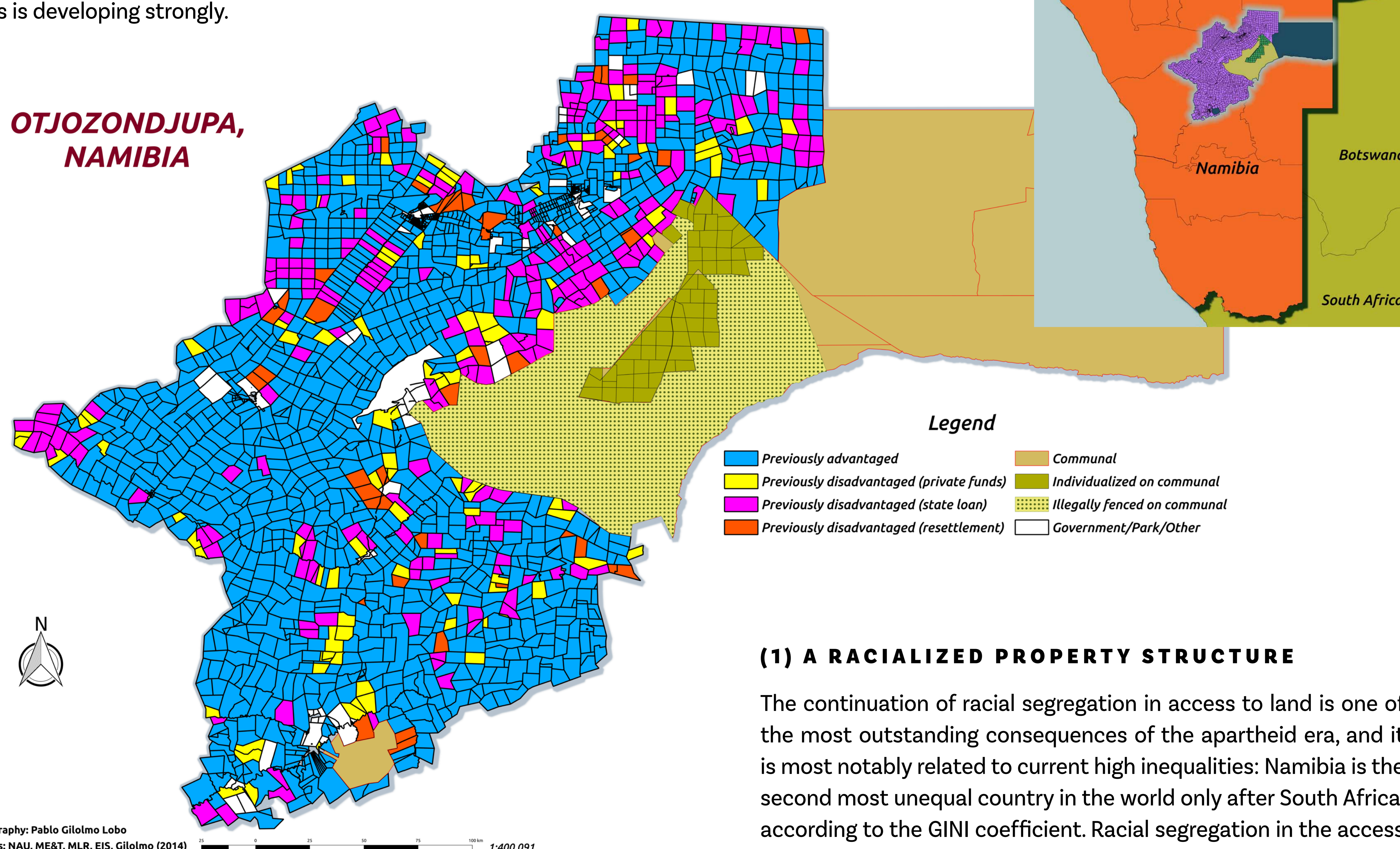
The second mechanism consists on a State-subsidized loan scheme, offered to citizens showing financial and technical capacities to farm commercially.

The third operates without state intervention, through the purchase of land with private funds.

Namibia is an ex-settler colony, in which all private land belonged to the white minority at the time of independence in 1990. The formerly “native reserves” are today communal lands under state property, and suffer extensively from illegal appropriation.

As for private lands, both the extent of redistribution from previously advantaged (white) to previously disadvantaged (non-white) citizens, as well the relative importance of the different means of access, indicate the racial and class significance of the land reform process.

**OTJOZONDJUPA,
NAMIBIA**

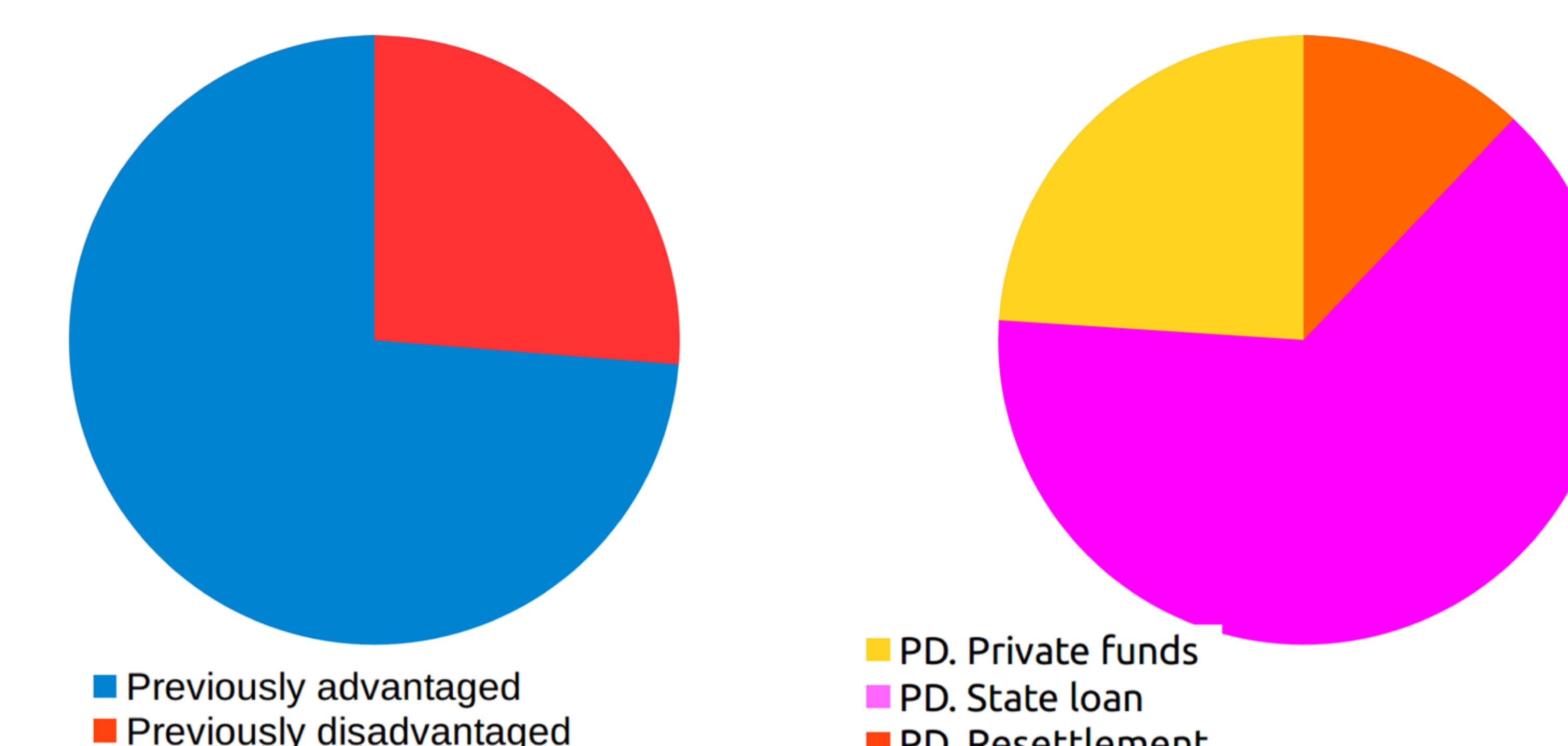


Cartography: Pablo Gilolmo Lobo
Sources: NAU, ME&T, MLR, EIS, Gilolmo (2014)

This poster condensates the research and results of Chapter 3.2 of my Masters Thesis at the University of Namibia, and has benefited greatly from my collaboration with the Sam Moyo African Institute for Agrarian Studies. I thank late Professor Moyo for being the first to encourage me to present this work at the 2015 AIAS Summer School.

(1) A RACIALIZED PROPERTY STRUCTURE

The continuation of racial segregation in access to land is one of the most outstanding consequences of the apartheid era, and it is most notably related to current high inequalities: Namibia is the second most unequal country in the world only after South Africa, according to the GINI coefficient. Racial segregation in the access to land holds also a political dimension, by which the dignity of entire peoples was diminished; land was a main motivation of an independence struggle still denied of this fundamental aspiration. The land redistributed in Otjozondjupa accounts for a 26.3% in about 25 years. At this pace, full redistribution would take almost a whole century to materialize, in a country where the white population is about 6%. In this scenario, it can be argued that white supremacy stays in force in Namibia, to a extent of a 73.7%.



	Hectares	%
Previously advantaged	4,525,228	73.7 %
Previously disadvantaged	1,612,460	26.3 %

	Hectares	%
Private funds	386,046	24%
State loan	1,030,738	63.9%
Resettlement	194,350	12.1%

(2) A DEVELOPING CLASS BIAS

In this analysis, the means of access to redistributed land is used as a **proxy** of class. Land property plus the capacity to acquire it through private funds are considered here as enough indication of a big capitalist or comprador class character. Acquisition through state-subsidized loan is considered here as indication of an emerging rural capitalist or petty bourgeois class character, while access to land through the resettlement scheme show an origin in an exploited under-class. However, the resettlement scheme is also accessed by high government officials and other beneficiaries hardly considered as lacking the resources. Thus, the figures depicted in the ‘means of access’ graph overplay the participation of this last group. It is therefore evident that market-led land redistribution is contributing to class-formation rather than to alleviating inequalities.