E. A. B. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and A. K. Améga, eds.
La Réforme agro-foncière dans les Pays du Conseil de l'Entente
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An international conference was held in Lama-Kara, northern
Togo, from 23-29 October 1978 on agrarian reform in the francophonie
West African countries belonging to the Conseil de l'Entente.
It was organised by E. A. B. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal of the
Afrika Studiecentrum, Leiden, and A. K. Améga, president of the
The Conseil de l'Entente, USAID, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign
Affairs, and the Afrika Studiecentrum provided financial support.
Conference participants met in plenary sessions and four special-
ised commissions to discuss papers on the Ivory Coast, Niger,
Togo, Upper Volta, and Benin, as well as two non-member countries,
Senegal and Mali. An introduction by the chief organiser, a
selection of the papers, and brief reports of the commissions are
published in this volume.

As in most conference volumes, the papers here differ greatly
in quality, subject, and approach. Van Rouveroy's introduction
identifies several reasons for agrarian reform often advanced by
African states, questions the possibility of using uniform legis-
lation as an instrument of development, and argues in favour of
detailed studies of the application and operation of new laws.
Verdier discusses the difficulties of implementing state legal
reforms and criticises some effects of agrarian reforms on rural
communities. In the only paper that ranges across all Entente
countries, Jouve examines the ways in which different reforms are
treated in constitutional doctrines. The other papers are pri-
marily case studies, though some authors draw out the wider impli-
cations of their material. LeBris, Tscha-Tokey, and van Rouveroy
present instances from Togo; Apaloo and the Benin Delegation dis-
cuss examples from Benin; LeRoy, Niang, and van der Klei consider
Senegal; and Rochevude analyses the role and limitations of law
in agrarian reforms in Mali. The volume includes no papers con-
cerned specifically with Niger, Upper Volta, or the Ivory Coast.

The diversity of these case studies virtually insures that
this collection will offer something of value to almost every
specialist in African land law and agrarian relations. I found
several papers to be of special interest. LeRoy gives an incisive
analysis of the evolution of Senegalese agrarian reform schemes, showing clearly their relationship to the processes of class formation. Tscha-Tokey's paper on agricultural tenancies and the Benin Delegation's discussion of development corporations contain a great deal of useful, detailed information on the legal forms through which peasants are integrated, by coercion or otherwise, into different forms of production under the aegis of colonial or post-colonial states. African states and many academic writers have continually fostered the myth of an all-encompassing, all-transforming state law, but the papers by van Rouveroy and Apaloo demonstrate the continued vivacity of rural conceptions and norms concerning land. In a detailed study of historical changes in social relations involving land in a densely populated area in southeast Togo, LeBras disposes of several commonly held misconceptions and also aims explicitly to place legal ideas in their broader historical and economic context.

These papers contribute different elements to the elaboration of a general conception of the contemporary transformation of rural African social relations. I would describe this transformation as the subsumption of agricultural producers within capitalist relations of production. During the past century African rural communities have been decisively integrated into the world capitalist economy. Integral to this process were the formation of colonial and neo-colonial states and a number of legal changes, including the transformation of rural legal ideas and the creation of 'customary law' as a historically specific legal form. Such themes underlie the more explicitly theoretical papers in this volume and are touched upon by others.

Many of the papers in the collection, however, do not give much attention to this particular conception of historical change or to showing the relationship between specific case studies and any more abstract theoretical explanation. Thus, Jouve hardly mentions the ways in which African constitutions have been influenced by the different positions of African states within the world economy or by the particular conjunction of international and domestic social forces which resulted partly from colonial domination. Niang reifies an essentially static, functionalist interpretation of 'customary law,' conceived simply as indigenous African law rather than as a general conception of African oral legal systems and a set of more specific legal forms that were articulated through the state. More generally, many of the papers accept more or less at face value the various rationalisations proposed by African states and the classes which compose or control them as a point of departure for analysing agrarian reforms.

Indeed, the theoretical convergence that I note among several
from a framework advanced by individual authors or even expressly recognised by many of the contributors. It does not, of course, constitute a logically complete theoretical statement, nor is it intended to suggest that these authors would all agree with each other or even with my view of the extent to which their ideas overlap or converge. But the ease with which such a view may be teased from several otherwise disparate papers suggests that these contributors to the conference differ sharply from some of the others in their presuppositions and conclusions about African agriculture, law, and the state. Such disagreements must have been apparent at the conference, but unfortunately they are given little attention in the somewhat bland reports of the commissions. These concern comparisons among Entente countries, relations between land law and socio-economic change, the impact of 'customary law' on agrarian reforms, and the implementation of state reforms concerning land—surely issues about which there is considerable controversy! The reader must also regret that an unavoidable accident, the loss of tape recordings in transit, prevented any report of the plenary discussions, in which the different viewpoints of the conference participants would undoubtedly have been expressed.

Despite these shortcomings, which are especially noticeable in the only published report of a major conference on African agrarian reform, a number of the papers raise crucial questions as to the ultimate beneficiaries of contemporary state policies towards agriculture in Africa. Moreover, though they often leave to the reader the task of providing an overall theoretical explanation, they provide useful information concerning relations between peasants and the state in different countries. Furthermore, many contributions, including the commissions' reports, embody a profound scepticism, if not disbelief, concerning the very possibility of a droit du développement. It is heartening to note that such diverse writers now generally share this view of the "law and development" enterprise, since widespread academic acceptance of the fundamentally misleading idea that dependent, peripheral capitalist states could or would use state law to promote "development" in the interests of all citizens has already obscured our understanding of legal changes in African countries and elsewhere for almost two decades. Viewed as a whole, this collection indicates the general range of current research by francophone scholars on African land systems and shows, at least implicitly, some main lines of disagreement. It is therefore a useful contribution to the literature on African agrarian reforms.