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# The new enclosures: critical perspectives on corporate land deals

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The contributions to this collection use the tools of agrarian political economy to explore the rapid growth and complex dynamics of large-scale land deals in recent years, with a special focus on the implications of big land deals for property and labour regimes, labour processes and structures of accumulation. The first part of this introductory essay examines the implications of this agrarian political economy perspective. First we explore the continuities and contrasts between historical and contemporary land grabs, before examining the core underlying debate around large- versus small-scale farming futures. Next, we unpack the diverse contexts and causes of land grabbing today, highlighting six overlapping mechanisms. The following section turns to assessing the crisis narratives that frame the justifications for land deals, and the flaws in the argument around there being excess, empty or idle land available. Next the paper turns to an examination of the impacts of land deals, and the processes of inclusion and exclusion at play, before looking at patterns of resistance and constructions of alternatives. The final section introduces the papers in the collection.

**Keywords:** land; land grab; enclosure; political economy

## Introduction: land deals in political economy perspective

The contributions to this collection use the tools of agrarian political economy to explore the rapid growth of large-scale land deals in recent years – the phenomenon popularly known as 'land grabbing', the large-scale acquisition of land or land-related rights and resources by corporate (business, non-profit or public)[1] entities.

This collection builds on two years of research collaboration through the Land Deal Politics Initiative (www.iss.nl/ldpi), a loose network initiated by the five authors of this introductory essay with the objective of promoting an agenda for more rigorous theoretical-empirical engaged research on the global land grab phenomenon. In 2009-2010 the 'LDPI five', in collaboration with the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, sponsored a small grants competition. The response was massive and positive, mostly coming from young researchers and PhD candidates. We provided a total of 40 grants, among them 20 on Africa supported by the Future Agricultures Consortium (www.future-agricultures.org) with each researcher receiving inputs and feedback from one or more of the LDPI five. The network has now expanded rapidly and widely. This initial phase of the LDPI initiative culminated with the International Conference on Global Land Grabbing held in April 2011 at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, where 120 academic papers were discussed (selected from close to 400 abstracts submitted in response to our call for papers) (www.future-agricultures.org/land-grab.html). We have now initiated a second round of 40 new small research grants and are planning a second conference at Cornell University in October 2012. This introductory essay is the collective product of the LDPI five, with the first author taking main responsibility.

[1]'Non-profit' here includes such bodies as pension funds.

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The focus is on the ways in which 'grabbing' creates specific kinds of property dynamics, namely dispossession of land, water, forests and other common property resources; their concentration, privatization and transaction as corporate (owned or leased) property; and in turn the transformation of agrarian labour regimes.

Since many contemporary large-scale land deals remain at the speculative stage, it is too early to see their longer-term impacts on local populations and agrarian structures. How extensive are these land deals? Are they occurring on the margins, or resulting in a significant restructuring of agrarian settings? Several groups in recent years have tried to document the location and extent of land deals (Anseeuw *et al.* 2012, von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, Cotula et al. 2009, GRAIN 2008, Oakland 2011, Oxfam 2011,World Bank 2010). Even if there were consensus on the definition of land grabs, and on the methodology of counting them, large land deals are typically shrouded in secrecy and no one really knows how much land has been acquired. Lorenzo Cotula has critically reviewed the available body of evidence, pointing to sources of both over- and under-estimation, but confirming that 'the phenomenon is massive and growing' (Cotula, 2012, this volume)[2].

A large scale land deal is often no more than a framework, under which concrete deals between agribusiness corporations and local governments for the purchase or leasing of designated areas may or may not emerge, and these deals in turn may not result until many years later in the actual enclosure of land, dispossession of its previous users and establishment of new production and labour regimes. Potentially, however, these deals open the way to a truly wide-ranging global 'land reform' – in this case, a regressive land reform where governments take land from the poor and give (or sell or lease) it to the rich.

Faced with the rapid spate of big land deals in recent years and in all continents, there is plenty of reason for researchers, activists and policymakers to be concerned with the immediate problems of dispossession, exclusion and adverse incorporation that local communities face. Besides these immediate issues however, there is also a need to look for deeper understandings of the phenomenon and its longer-term implications for agricultural and rural futures, in other words to disentangle the immediate and the more fundamental dynamics at work.

Building on and complementing other recent and forthcoming paper collections on specific aspects of land deals,[3] this volume explores the complex dynamics of corporate land deals in a broad agrarian political economy perspective, with a special focus on the implications for property and labour regimes, labour processes and structures of accumulation. Among other things this can involve looking at ways in which existing patterns of rural social differentiation – in terms of class and gender, perhaps also ethnicity and generation – are being shaped by changes in land

[2]With some differences in definition and the time-span covered, recent estimates of the total area of large land deals world-wide range from 43 million ha (World Bank 2010) to 80 million ha (ILC 2011), and 227 million ha (Oxfam 2011). Among these and other reports there is reasonable consistency that at least 60 percent of total acquisitions are in sub-Saharan Africa.
[3]It builds on and complements other *Journal of Peasant Studies* special issues on *Biofuels, land and agrarian change* (McMichael and Scoones eds. 2010), *New frontiers of land control* (Peluso and Lund eds. 2011), and *Green Grabbing: A new appropriation of nature?* (Fairhead, Leach and Scoones eds. 2012), the *JPS* 'Forum on Global Land Grabbing' featuring contributions by Deininger, de Schutter and Li (Borras *et al.* 2011, Deininger 2011, De Schutter 2011, Li 2011), as well as the special issue under review at *Development and change* on *Governing global land deals: The role of the state in the rush for land* (Borras, Hall, Scoones, White and Wolford, eds. n.d.).

use and property relations, as well as by the re-organization of production and exchange as rural communities and resources are incorporated in global commodity chains. Also important (and sometimes forgotten by political economists) is the politics which steers all this: the role of mobilization, struggle or resistance in shaping, negotiating and challenging new land investments; the various competing policy and political narratives and discourses around the multiple crises of food, energy, climate and finance, and their impact on, or use in, land deal negotiations, the emerging or continuing dynamics of elite power and corruption, and the role of global land policies of international development agencies in facilitating and encouraging, or blocking and discouraging, land deals.

Although all the contributions to this collection are concerned with some aspect of large-scale land deals, the acquisition of land is not an end in itself. Some land deals (for example those made by hedge funds and pension funds) may be purely speculative, betting on rising global land values; investors put their money in land, as they might put it in gold, works of art, British Petroleum shares or pork-belly futures. Speculative investment aside however, the purpose of the great majority of corporate land grabs is to establish agricultural production (or other forms of extraction such as mining) on a large scale, and to guarantee access to its products. We are of course not the first to make this observation. As Marx noted in the remarks on the English enclosures in which he first coined the term 'land grabbing'

> Land grabbing on a great scale [...] is the first step in creating a field for the establishment of agriculture on a great scale. Hence this subversion of agriculture puts on, at first, more the appearance of a political revolution. (Marx 1906 [1867] *Capital*. Vol. I., p. 470)

What does this 'political revolution' (or social-economic-political revolution) involve? And what concepts do we need to analyze and describe it, and at what levels? What kinds of analytical tools do we need to understand relations between the level of the larger circuits of global (agribusiness) capital, and changes happening at the level of local communities, and at the various intermediate levels between? These questions are the agrarian manifestation of the more general issue that all social sciences have to confront: how do we frame and grasp the relations and dynamics between the local and the global, the individual, group and wider society, between 'actors' and 'structures'? And more specifically, how do global or national corporations and investors hope to organize the production and delivery of export crops? What alternatives are available to them in commanding land and labour? These issues can mostly be explored using very simple questions, and simple language, as in Bernstein's much-quoted 'Marxian *haiku*'[4] on key questions in agrarian political economy: 'who owns what? who does what? who gets what? what do they do with it?' (Bernstein 2010, 22). To these questions we would add two more: 'what do they do to each other? (How do social classes and groups in society and within the state interact with each other?)', to capture the relational and political side of property and labour regimes, labour processes and structures of accumulation, and 'How do changes in politics get shaped by dynamic ecologies and vice versa?', emphasising the political-ecological context of land deals.

Then of course we need to go further than these descriptive ('what?' and 'who?') questions, in order to understand the 'how' and 'why' of these patterns.

[4]The phrase is from Michael Watts (2012, 200).

These questions, we think, can be approached with the help of a nested hierarchy of 'umbrella' concepts: the (global) agro-commodity regime; (global) commodity chains or value chains, and (agrarian) labour regimes.

Food and other agro-commodity regimes[5] are political regimes of global value relations (Araghi 2003), which take on particular forms in different eras. The contemporary context of neo-liberal globalization means not just increasing world-wide connections, but a project to organize those connections in a certain way:

> The globalization project is an attempt to fashion the world around a central principle through powerful political and financial institutions. ...
> an emerging vision of the world and its resources as a globally organized and managed free trade/free enterprise economy pursued by a largely unaccountable political and economic elite. (McMichael 2000, 241, 354)

Of course we (and McMichael) are not the first to make this observation.

> Chased around the world by its burning desire for ever-expanding markets, the bourgeoisie has no choice but to settle everywhere; cultivate everywhere; establish connections everywhere ... in a nutshell, it creates the world in its own image. (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848)

> Literally before our eyes the world's agriculture [...] is being more and more drawn into the circulation of the world economy, and the centres of capitalism are more and more subordinating it to their leadership. (Chayanov 1966 [1925], 257)

The food regime concept, developed initially by Friedmann and McMichael (1989), allows us to refocus 'from the commodity as object to the commodity as relation, with definite geo-political, social, ecological and nutritional relations at significant historical moments' (McMichael 2009, 63). Analysis of evolving agro-commodity regimes thus has to encompass many levels, from local to global, if like Chayanov we hope to understand 'the social threads that bind Sidor Karpov's farm, lost in the Perm' forests, to the London banks and oblige him to feel the effects of changes in the pulse rate of the London stock exchange' (Chayanov 1966 [1925], 257). These commodity-specific 'social threads' are nowadays analysed as global commodity chains: '... all the activities that connect the production of commodities with their final consumption [...] and the actors and institutions, relations and practices, that structure those journeys' (Bernstein 2010, 125). The local producers, distant consumers and many other agents linked in these chains all claim a share of the 'added value' at various points in the chain, and their inclusion or exclusion and the strength of their claims are highly influenced by the exercise of power at various levels.

At the local end of these value chains, labour regime analysis is a useful tool for analyzing agrarian structures and comparing them across space and time, and identifying points and processes of contestation, conflict and negotiation. Henry Bernstein's definition – 'specific methods of mobilizing labour and organizing it in production, and their particular social, economic and political conditions' (Bernstein 1988, 31-2) – emphasizes that the emergence of specific labour regimes is not

[5]Since not only food crops but also feed, fibre and fuel crops are involved, this awkward formulation is more accurate than 'food regime'.

inevitable but the product of politics.[6] A modern and flexible agrarian political economy also incorporates, in its exploration of these dynamic relationships and processes, both material and ideological aspects, as well as dimensions that were relatively neglected in classical agrarian studies such as the dynamics of gender, ethnicity, livelihoods diversity, mobility and rural-urban links.

In the following sections we examine the implications of this agrarian political economy perspective on large-scale large deals. First we explore the continuities and contrasts between contemporary processes and historical experiences, before examining the core underlying debate around small- versus large-scale farming futures. Next, we unpack the diverse, overlapping causes of land grabbing today in different contexts, highlighting six overlapping mechanisms. The following section turns to assessing the crisis narratives that frame the justifications for land deals, and the flaws in the argument around there being 'excess', 'empty' or 'idle' land available. Next the paper turns to an examination of the impacts of land deals, and the processes of inclusion and exclusion at play, followed by brief observations on regulation, resistance and constructions of alternatives. The final section introduces the papers in the collection.

## Historical dimensions: continuities and contrasts

> . . . what is so new [. . .] about 'land grabbing'? Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and English colonizers were heavily engaged in both land grabbing and the creation of private property [. . .] The ways officials implemented land controls differed from one colony to another, or differed by crop, by region of a colony, or by legal logic, and often changed over colonial times. What is new in the land grabs today are the new mechanisms of land control, their justifications and alliances for 'taking back' the land, as well as the political economic context of neoliberalism. (Peluso and Lund 2011, 672)

Most regions of the global South, as well as the global North, have a long history of land 'grabbing' on a large scale. In the North, the best-known episodes have been the European and particularly the British enclosures. But we should also recall the dispossession of the native peoples of North America and Australasia, and, arguably, some historical episodes of forced socialist collectivization. In many regions of the global South land was first grabbed by pre-colonial rulers in chronic territorial wars with each other, then by colonial governments and increasingly by foreign or domestic corporations. Through the nineteenth century, outright sale by colonial powers of large tracts of land held under customary tenure was quite common, but this was often prohibited or limited by later colonial legislation so that long, renewable leases became the norm. Liz Alden Wily (2012, this volume) argues that the current spate of land deals is 'less a new phenomenon than a significant surge in the continuing capture of ordinary people's rights and assets by capital-led and class-creating social transformation'. Using the examples of the Irish and English enclosures of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the North American dispossession of native populations, and the three great African land rushes of 1885-

[6]We prefer this older, broader definition to those in Bernstein's more recent publications – most recently 'different methods of recruiting labour and their connections within how labour is organized in production (labour process) and how it secures its subsistence' (Bernstein 2010, 53) – which are heavier on the structure side and appear to omit the essential aspects of agency and power.

1915, 1919-1939, and 1945-1955, she underlines one key common aspect of all these land-grabbing episodes, the legal manipulations that 'render untitled (but traditionally occupied and used) lands as unowned, and the state, by default, their legal owner' (Wily 2012, this volume).

In the late-colonial and post-colonial decades both governments and civil society groups in many countries attempted to correct some of these historical distortions by land reforms or other means of breaking up large private or corporate estates and their redistribution to smallholders. Some of these initiatives were modest reformist measures intended to stem the radicalisation of the rural poor as a political force, as in Kenya's Swynnerton Plan of 1954, while others were adopted by newly independent post-colonial states engaged in nationalist projects of indigenisation (El-Ghonemy 2001, Heyer *et al.* 1981, 102–103, Sorenson 1967). The World Bank also was a major proponent of the breakup of large corporate plantations in favour of small farmer based agricultural development strategies through the second half of the twentieth century. Radical land reforms, in the context of revolutionary regime change, saw the division of large privately-owned land-holdings and their redistribution to tenants and landless workers, sometimes with the goal of creating a stable and productive mass of relatively homogeneous 'family farms' (Ghose 1983), and in other cases as a first step towards eventual socialist collectivisation.

Paradoxically, all these policies are now being reversed as governments and international development organisations support the acquisition of great expanses of land by large corporations, both foreign and domestic – usually in the form of long-term concessions or leases rather than outright purchase – in the name of development. Thus large-scale capitalist farming, which Jan Douwe van der Ploeg argues had formerly 'nearly disappeared, among other things through the many land reform processes that swept the world', is now 're-emerging everywhere under the aegis of the agro-export model' (van der Ploeg 2008, 2). This reversal predates the current land rush of the past decade; rather, its conditions were laid partly in structural adjustment and neo-liberal reforms that indebted developing countries were subjected to during the 1980s, and the former Soviet Union countries during the 1990s, which promoted market-driven enclosure in some regions and the privatisation of state farms in others. As Kojo Amanor argues, 'many agribusiness companies have been at the forefront of large-scale land acquisitions for many years, and [. . .] the dynamic towards land grabbing arises internally from the logic of agribusiness accumulation rather than from exogenous developments' (2012, this volume).

While large-scale land acquisitions, linked to advocacy of large farm models for production, have their precursors in the colonial plantations and estates, the dualistic economies of the former settler colonies and the latifundia of Latin America there are important contrasts with the contemporary rush for land. The (potentially) enormous scale and speed of expansion of the current deals, which may be more rapid than previous land 'rushes' in colonial or post-colonial history, may mean that they will have correspondingly greater impacts in radically restructuring agrarian economies, transforming livelihoods and rural social relations and, with this, changing the power dynamics in the countryside across the global South, with major implications for national, and indeed regional and international, politics. Contemporary forms of agrarian transition involve investments and dispossession that expel people from agriculture without absorbing their labour in manufactures or elsewhere in the economy, and create an 'agrarian question of labour' (Bernstein 2004) involving large 'surplus populations' of the dispossessed (Li 2009, 2010, Araghi 2010). This probably represents a majority of historical capitalist agrarian transitions worldwide, the main exceptions being the 'classic' agrarian transitions of (parts of) industrializing Europe and East Asia. Thus, as Tanner concludes for Mozambique

> There are clear signs that [...] the Mozambican enclosures could produce the same result as their predecessors in Europe – a dispossessed rural majority, and migration to towns. Yet, unlike Europe, this will be in a country that is not about to embark on a labour-intensive industrial revolution generating thousands of new jobs for the dispossessed peasant farmers and their families. (Tanner 2010, 125)

'Surplus population' here has nothing to do with Malthusian or neo-Malthusian theories of absolute overpopulation (the notion that human populations have some natural tendency to grow until they outstrip the limits of subsistence), but a historically-specific relative surplus population, itself the result of capital accumulation and technical progress, which is 'surplus' not to society's capacity to provide subsistence but to capital's requirements for labour, resulting in low wages of the employed and pauperism of the un- and underemployed even in contexts of rapid economic development, producing 'the wonderful phenomenon ... that a nation must starve to death from sheer wealth and abundance' (Marx 1977, 591f.). Nowadays it is not only agriculture, but also many other sectors whose 'development', through capital investment and technical change, involves the shedding, rather than the absorption, of labour.

## The underlying debate: large- vs. small-scale agricultural futures

Underlying historical moves towards enclosure and industrial farming on the one hand and campaigns for the retention of smallholder farming on the other, is the broader issue of the relative superiority of large-scale versus small-scale farming. This has its origins in the debates between Marxists and agrarian populists (Lenin 1960 [1899], Chayanov 1966 [1925], Kautsky 1988 [1899]) which have framed much of the critical agrarian studies and research in the 1970s-80s, including the urban versus rural bias debate between Byres and Lipton (Kay 2009, 109-115) and which intersect with more specific arguments on the so-called 'inverse relationship' between farm size and productivity (see also Byres 2004, Bernstein 2010, Griffin *et al* 2002, Lipton 2009, Hazell *et al*. 2010, Wiggins *et al*. 2010). In reaction to the contemporary phenomenon of land grabbing and the negative assumptions that are made about the consequences of large-scale agriculture for food security and employment, Peter Gibbon has reviewed the historical evidence on the productivity and employment generation record of 'plantation farming and large-scale farming' in twentieth century sub-Saharan Africa. He concludes that large-scale farms have not always been less productive, or less labour absorbing, than small, but that they are generally marked by relatively 'low quality of employment' (Gibbon 2011).

Advocacy of a large farm model for agricultural growth, linked to assumed comparative advantages in a globalised economy, is often at the centre of justifications for large-scale corporate land deals (Collier 2008). A 'dualistic' agrarian economy is envisaged, with large scale farms engaged in capitalist production often for export, while smallholder farms gradually disappear or are incorporated as part of contract farming arrangements, with the former peasantry proletarianised, providing low paid labour to the new estates and plantations. This is the trajectory envisaged in the World Bank's much-cited, and much criticized, report on *Agriculture for Development* (World Bank 2008)[7]. In the increasingly integrated value chains of global agricultural production, it is argued, only large farms or smallholder outgrowers hooked into large agribusiness nuclei can compete, and meet the kinds of standards required for successful export. An agribusiness-oriented vision for agriculture, with large-scale farms at the core, even if linked through outgrower schemes to smallholders, is one that some see as the logical and perhaps inevitable extension of global capital into rural economies; a culmination of processes of agrarian change and capitalist transformation (Sender and Johnston 2004). This argument has been taken on by national governments, investors and donor agencies alike. This has made many policy actors, eager to promote private sector driven investments but on the other hand committed to a discourse of support for smallholder farming, decidedly ambivalent about the process of global land grabbing.

The World Bank for example, while arguing forcefully for private sector investment in land and agriculture, has also made a cogent argument for smallholder based land reform (Binswanger and Deininger 1999), even though advocating a flawed 'willing buyer-willing seller' model (cf. Borras, Kay and Lahiff 2007 for a critique). Indeed the Bank, which for some years has juggled 'politically correct messages about the need to support small farmers' with policy and financial support for agribusiness (Oya 2009, 595, cf. Akram-Lodhi 2008) can hardly oppose large-scale corporate investment in farmland when it is itself an important promoter and facilitator of these investments. A parallel track is envisaged, with large-scale export-oriented farms in some areas, while smaller-scale production persists elsewhere. Recent experiences in Zimbabwe show how such a dualistic model of agrarian structure is unsustainable on both economic and justice grounds in the long term and that, following land reform, many smallholders have been successful at 'accumulating from below' and engaging in markets, including for export, despite numerous constraints (Scoones *et al.* 2010). In some ways, the 'win-win' proposition in the current land grab policy discourse builds on the assumption that small farms can, and should, be linked to large farms through a variety of contract farming schemes, as long as these are transparent and follow a broad set of principles of responsible investments (Deininger 2011).

'Large versus small' in fact may not be the most crucial point in envisaging farming futures. It is at least possible to imagine a large-scale farm production unit which is based on low-input and mixed cropping rather than high-input monocrop cultivation, using artisanal and employment-enhancing rather than capital-intensive and labour-shedding techniques, which is water-saving, earth-cooling and sustainable and maintains the dignity and food security of those who work in it, and based on principles of agrarian and environmental justice rather than capitalist profit maximization. Only it is rather hard to imagine that socially responsible large farming of this type would be based on corporate capital rather than collective or cooperative ownership.

## Contexts, causes and mechanisms

Large-scale land deals, while sensational, are only the most recent and visible manifestation of a growing agrarian crisis around the world, reflected in heightened

[7]Among many critical views on the World Bank Report, see particularly Akram-Lodhi 2008 and Li 2009.

levels of food insecurity, poverty, landlessness and environmental degradation (Patnaik 2010, Weis 2010, Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011, McMichael 2012, this volume). High world food and fuel prices in 2007-08 led to a wave of protests and anti-government riots in more than 60 countries (Holt-Gimenez and Patel with Shattuck 2009, Bello 2009), precipitating protectionist measures by those with food production capacities and expansionist strategies by those without. The combined effects of global climate change, agro-industrial development, natural resource extraction, neo-liberal austerity policies and rapid urbanization have increased insecurity and vulnerability in rural areas across the globe. Several decades of neoliberal policy prescriptions have resulted in a diminution of state capacity, the privatisation of previously public assets and the financialisation of economic networks, linked to a new form of global capitalism.

This historical juncture has profound impacts on rural economies and agrarian livelihoods. The opening of markets, combined with the indebtedness of developing country nations, has opened up opportunities for land grabbing. Alliances between state officials, local political elites and domestic and foreign investors enable them to seize these opportunities for the appropriation of resources. For the state, often in dire fiscal straits, such a moment also provides an opportunity for extending its reach, exerting power over marginal areas and peoples, as well as extracting rent from such 'unruly' places (cf. Scott 2009). Corporate land grabbing is thus linked to a new expansion of state authority and control (Borras *et al.* n.d.).

David Harvey (2003, 2005) argues that contemporary political-economic relations facilitate a process of 'accumulation by dispossession', whereby public assets are enclosed, with some able to make a profit from these resources, while others are excluded in an important extension of the classic process of primitive accumulation described by Marx. We might therefore see land grabbing as an outcome of the inter-relating processes of privatization and financialization which Harvey identifies as central to neo-liberal capitalism, as well as being fuelled by 'the management and manipulation of crises' – and particularly the discursive emphases on multiple 'scarcities' in policy debates – and what he terms 'state redistributions', whereby the state allies with capitalist business interests, offering concessionary terms, tax breaks and subsidies to support investment.

In this contemporary context, we argue (drawing on Wolford 2010 and Safransky and Wolford 2011) that the rapid increase in large-scale land and resource deals can be linked to six trends which promote various mechanisms of accumulation through land investment, some of which repeat historical manoeuvres from the colonial handbook while others involve new configurations of old relations. Different mechanisms of accumulation result in different forms of dispossession, each with different consequences for rural livelihoods and social and political relations.

First, the *global anticipation of food insecurity* has prompted widespread corporate investment in food crops (some destined as human foods, and some as feed for the growing livestock industry) (Foresight 2010, Godfray *et al.* 2010). Although not new, investment levels have increased in the past ten years, particularly in areas where industrial inputs are readily available, markets relatively accessible, and land costs low. The expanding volume and changing diet of fast growing large economies such as China and India has triggered major shifts in how much and what kind of food crops are produced, and how. The 'meatification' of changing diets (Weis 2010) has profound impact on the feed complex (soya, corn, and so on) with has direct consequences for land use. A significant part of land deals in Latin

America has been for soya expansion. Food importing countries such as the Gulf States and South Korea felt that they could not rely any longer on market sourcing of food through the surplus-based food regime that existed in the recent past (McMichael 2009), and looked for avenues of more direct control of food supply, resulting in their efforts to gain direct control of off-shore land and in turn off-shore food production (as in the case of Libya in Mali, South Korea in Madagascar, Saudi Arabia in Sudan).

Second, fears of rising and volatile fuel prices and peak oil or loss of national sovereignty through 'foreignization' of energy resources have promoted increasing reliance on, and demand for, *new forms of resource extraction for fuel security* and national development (Zoomers 2010, White and Dasgupta 2010). In this context Borras, McMichael and Scoones identified a 'biofuel complex', arguing that the biofuels revolution is a response to 'an assumed ''energy crisis'', as the cost of capital inputs (production, processing, transport) rises in an age of peaking oil supplies. In addition, a desire to reduce dependence on Middle-Eastern oil drives governments to develop an industrial biofuels complex that delivers ''energy security''. At the same time, biofuels represent a new profitability frontier for agribusiness and energy sectors beset with declining productivity and/or rising costs' (2010, 576). The alliances being formed blur the boundaries between food, feed and fuel in vertically integrated agribusinesses, often in 'triangular' relationships between North and South (Dauvergne and Neville 2010). For example, major multi-national players such as Cargill and Monsanto are involved in a 'feed-fuel alliance', using genetically modified maize, soy and rapeseed (TNI 2007). In the 'palm-oil alliance' the Indonesian palm oil trade is dominated by Cargill (the world's largest private company), ADM-Kuck-Wilmar (the world's largest biofuels manufacturer), and Synergy Drive, a large Malaysian government company. In addition, an 'ethanol alliance', involving the US, Brazil, Argentina and large multinational players, links with India, China, Mozambique and South Africa in new sugar-soy production enterprises, promoted by EU and US subsidies and trade preferences (Borras *et al.* 2010). Thus the standard narrative that those involved in such deals are simply foreign companies from the North appropriating land in the South is inaccurate. There are South-South alliances, as well as relationships between Northern and Southern actors, both public and private. National governments in the South, as well as national and local elites, are intimately involved (Dauvergne and Neville 2010, Cotula 2012, this volume).

This reconfiguration of the global food-feed-fuel industry creates new political-economic configurations, but also new types of farming. Crops, for example, are envisaged in new ways. In Latin America and the Caribbean 'flex crops' – crops that have multiple and flexible uses within the global food, feed and fuel complex – have led to a relatively safer, and so more attractive investment, because they somehow allow for 'diversification within a single crop': sell as sugar when ethanol price is low, sell as ethanol when sugar price is low; sell palm oil as cooking oil when biodiesel market is not yet ready, sell as biodiesel when supply for cooking oil is high, and so on (Borras *et al.* 2012). Yet the biofuel revolution is not all large-scale plantations, run by conglomerates of multinational companies in alliance with national governments. There are also many small-scale operations, involving NGOs, responding to climate change targets (Hunsberger 2010, Ariza *et al.* 2010) and smaller private companies, investing in crops such as *Jatropha* (Sulle and Nelson 2009). These have different consequences and impacts, yet remain caught up in the wider political economy of the biofuel complex.

The third contextual trend promoting accumulation through land acquisitions is *new environmental imperatives and tools*, both of which have helped generate what John Vidal calls the 'Great Green Land Grab' – the appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends (see Fairhead *et al.* 2012). The application of the market paradigm to the environment ('market environmentalism') has become an important trend which reinforces a growing 'metabolic rift', and so the separation of people and nature (Schneider and McMichael 2010, Moore 2011). The 'neoliberalization' of nature and the environment creates new alliances of actors, new patterns of commoditisation and new forms of governance (Castree 2008a, 2008b, McCarthy and Prudham 2004, Heynen *et al.* 2007). New non-governmental organizations have formed to negotiate the complicated but potentially lucrative rules of carbon cap and trade programs or REDD initiatives – Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation. Motivated by these opportunities to match conservation with income generation opportunities, NGOs such as the World Land Trust, Cool Earth and the WildLands have purchased hundreds of thousands of hectares of so-called 'empty' land globally. Such processes, as Fairhead, Leach and Scoones (2012) explain, build on long histories of colonial and neo-colonial resource alienation in the name of the environment, which have resulted in the creation of forest reserves, national parks and often draconian interventions to reduce assumed degradation by local people. The new market environmentalism, however, also involves new dynamics of commodification, with the environment valued for 'products' and 'services' in new markets. This process results in an important mechanism of accumulation, driven by new values for carbon, wildlife, ecosystem services and landscapes more broadly (Corbera *et al.* 2007).

A fourth emerging mechanism of accumulation involves the establishment of *extensive infrastructure corridors* and S*pecial Economic Zones*. These are focused on infrastructure investments and have been constructed to link extractive frontiers to metropolitan areas and foreign markets. Funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and Chinese and other transnational investors, infrastructure corridors throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America are designed to serve as the many super highways that will help open as-yet untapped areas of the developing world to private foreign investment, agribusiness expansion, and natural resource extraction. Special Economic Zones have mushroomed in many fast growing economies, e.g. India and China. This has led to expropriation of lands, especially in peri-urban areas, for the industrial and commercial complexes and the corresponding urban sprawl. This has led to massive land conflicts in these countries (see e.g. Levien 2012, this collection).

The fifth contextual development involves the *creation of new financial instruments* intended to reduce market risk while allowing third party investors to profit from widespread concerns that food is running out. Private equity groups such as TIAA-CREF (a US pension fund), Berkshire-Hathaway (led by Warren Buffet), the Pharos Group (led by George Soros) and Black River Asset Management (led by Cargill) manage a variety of investments that increasingly include pieces of foreign territory. There are many new players involved in land investments globally (Pearce 2012). This involves big money, with (at least claimed) high returns. There is much speculative activity, involving a range of sovereign, hedge and asset funds. As highlighted by the Oakland Institute (2011), pension funds from US universities are players in land deals, as well as many others. These investments often involve complex operations. One instructive example is Emergent Asset Management, a

UK-South African financial management firm which previously focused on hedge funds but now specialises in farmland investments in Africa, including the African Agricultural Land Fund. A partnership with the top South African company, Grainvest, resulted in the Emvest Agricultural Corporation, which is now a vehicle for South African, UK and other investors to diversify their investments into African agriculture. Currently fourteen countries are being targeted, and the fund has a value of over US$500m. The fund's long-term objective according to its website is 'to secure food production across a diverse range of soft commodities managed across sub-Saharan Africa and throughout the value chain. Africa is one of the final frontiers for alpha generation, an un-crowded market reflecting the Emergent ethos of acting "pro alia" [sic] or "before others"'. It goes on to explain how 'EmVest is establishing farming hubs throughout the region, working with national and local authorities to develop large scale agriculture on a commercial basis, within a socially responsible framework, at a consistently high level of execution' and offers investors 'target risk-adjusted returns [of] +25% per annum from combined soft commodity production yields and land price appreciation. Such yield enhancement is based on the introduction of modern farming techniques and technologies to increase yields, while agglomerating farms to increase efficiency and generate economies of scale'. The website argues that 'Agriculture is an excellent defensive investment in the long term with expected real price appreciation of soft commodities and land in Africa'.[8] This is one among many examples of investment in land and agriculture, based on a large-farm and high-tech model, supported by investment finance through a range of vehicles.[9]

Finally, another development promoting land deals is the emerging set of *rules, regulations and incentives provided by the international community*, enshrined in international legal frameworks and facilitated by aid and lending programmes. Multilateral organizations from the United Nations to the international development banks are generating both supply and demand in the global rush for resources. Panicked estimates of increasing demand for food cited at high-level agro-investment conferences fuel speculation. At the same time, international agencies such as the World Bank and USAID have worked to create a hospitable environment for large-scale investment, funnelling money into Africa and Latin America for the purposes of 'rural development' and 'improving rural markets'. Contradictory signals and accompanying discourses often exist within and across organisations. Within the World Bank Group, support for smallholder farming exists alongside investment support for large-scale land deals from the International Finance Corporation and insurance to cover land investments from the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA). For example, MIGA recently supplied Chayton Atlas Investments with 'political risk insurance' for a series of planned agriculture investments in southern Africa, including a USS$50m investment in Zambia involving the acquisition of 20,000 hectares of irrigated farmland[10]. The MIGA website explains that its mission is 'to promote foreign direct investment into underserved markets'.

[8]www.emergentasset.com (accessed October 19 2011); http://blogs.reuters.com/africanews/2010/08/24/african-agricultural-finance-under-the-spotlight/ (accessed 7 November 2011).

[9]Agriculture and land investment conferences are now regularly held, offering investors access to information and advice on land investments globally (see (http://www.aginvestconference.com/london/index.shtml and http://www.terrapinn.com/2012/agri/index.stm, accessed 5 February 2012).

[10]http://www.miga.org/news/index.cfm?aid=2637 (accessed 12 February 2012).

The Chayton Atlas support 'is a clear illustration of how we can help investors put in place the risk-mitigation instruments needed to meet sub-Saharan Africa's vast investment needs in a time of global economic turmoil'. This contract, it explains is 'ongoing support to private equity funds', whereby the contract can be used by fund managers 'to raise capital from institutional investors'[11]. While such instruments help unleash much needed investment financing in agriculture, the focus and impacts do not seem to be subject to rigorous scrutiny, and in important respects the emphasis runs counter to policy advice and analysis from elsewhere in the World Bank Group.[12]

Imbalances between investors and recipients are exacerbated by the legal frameworks for land investments which often result in highly inequitable deals, with benefits accruing to the investor and the risks being carried by the host government or community. Bilateral investment treaties often provide the framework for transnational land deals. As Malik (2011) explains, stabilisation clauses in these treaties are highly restrictive, and mean that states are locked in to particular agreements over long periods, and cannot impose new laws as they may be subject to disputes, and potentially massive compensation payments. Globally there are over 3000 bilateral investment treaties across 183 counties, with many emerging from European countries, with Germany, Netherlands and the UK being particularly significant (Malik 2011). These treaties allow private individuals or companies to bring claims against governments in international tribunals, where the scales are balanced very much in favour of the investor. In the case of Pakistan, Malik shows how large scale investments have occurred in what the state defined as 'barren lands'. Allocating large areas for new agricultural investments meant that investors required water in large quantities, although water access had not been covered in the deal, and investors had to increase extraction, affecting neighbouring land users. There was no prior legislation on water use, so through the new land contract, new private investors had essentially uncontrolled access to highly valuable public water resources, with potentially serious long-term consequences for the wider ecosystem and people's livelihoods. The nature of the contract, involving long-term leasing of land (over 99 years), meant that investor rights overrode all other rights and any subsequent legislation over this period. Thus any new legislation on, for example, environmental management, labour rights, export restrictions and so on could legitimately be challenged by investors under the terms of the contract, thus limiting opportunities for changing the terms of deal over a long period.

## Crisis narratives and empty lands

The justification for land investments on a large scale is often presented around a series of 'crisis narratives', linked to growing scarcity and impending catastrophe. The underlying assumption is that the solution to such food, energy and climate 'crises' lies in capturing the potentials of so-called' marginal, empty, and available' lands across the globe.

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[11]http://www.miga.org/news/index.cfm?aid=2635 (accessed 12 February 2012)

[12]The World Bank Group of course is not the only agency where 'joined up' thinking, advice and investment is absent. This is replicated across most of the aid agencies, where confusion abounds as to how to match a focus on private sector led investment and 'pro poor', 'inclusive' growth.

The World Bank, for example, undertook an influential assessment of the world's 'available land' and concluded that 'The currently non-cultivated area suitable for cropping that is non-forested, non-protected, and populated with less than 25 persons/km2 (or 20 ha/household) amounts to 446 million ha. This is equivalent to almost a third of globally cropped land which is 1.5 billion ha' (World Bank 2010, xv-xvi). Potential land availability was then plotted against the potential for increasing yields (the 'yield gap') for all countries to reveal four 'types' of countries: ones with little land for expansion and a low yield gap, those with suitable land available and a low yield gap (such as Brazil, Argentina and Ukraine), those with little land available and a high yield gap (such as Malawi, Rwanda, India or Egypt) and those where there is deemed to be suitable land available and a high yield gap (such as Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique). The report describes these countries as including 'countries with large tracts of suitable land, but also a large proportion of smallholders with very low productivity. If labour supply constrains smallholder expansion and in-migration is limited, larger farm sizes enabled through mechanization could be a viable strategy. This situation could create opportunities for outside investors' (World Bank 2010, xviii). The report goes on to argue that commodity-level analysis shows how 'in many African countries with large amounts of suitable but currently uncultivated land, transfers of technology could provide large benefits to local populations' (World Bank 2010, xviii).

This now familiar diagnosis misses many critical points. First, measures of 'potential production' under 'best practices' give a misleading picture of what is possible in such areas, with poor infrastructure, limited input supplies and inadequate market connections. The yield gaps resulting are therefore wildly inflated, giving unrealistic expectations of potential. Second, what may appear 'available' may in fact be being used for a range of livelihood activities, from small-scale farm production to pastoralism to shifting cultivation. 'Availability' suggests that there are no claims over the land and, although the World Bank report discusses issues of land governance and tenure, this is not part of the assessment of potential land supply. Lorenzo Cotula shows the inaccuracy of the rhetoric on targeting of 'marginal' lands for investment: 'investor interest often focuses on the best land in terms of water availability and irrigation potential, soil fertility, proximity to markets or availability of infrastructure' (Cotula 2012, this volume). Third, in those countries deemed to have plentiful land and a high yield gap, a scenario involving large-scale farms, mechanisation and technological investments in crop production is outlined, in the absence of any critical assessment of the experience of past initiatives of this kind in similar areas. Memories of past grand experiments to mechanise farming through large-scale production – whether the irrigation schemes of the Gezira in Sudan or the groundnut programmes of Senegal or Tanzania – seem to have been lost.

While clearly deeply flawed, the justificatory discourse for urgent action and focused solution is nevertheless a powerful one, and frames a particular political economy of intervention which garners support among national governments, private sector investors and international banks and donor agencies.

## Terms of inclusion: impacts on agrarian societies

Many of the countries being targeted for land deals have been starved of investment in their agricultural sector for decades, as both state and donor attention waned

(World Bank 2010). Boosting capital investment, improving infrastructure, facilitating access to new technologies and providing much-needed rural employment are all facets of land deals that are potentially positive. Then why, despite the theoretical potentials, do large-scale commercial land deals so often result in negative consequences, not only for those immediately affected, but also for the wider economy? Why are the much-touted win-win solutions so difficult to realise?

These questions underline the need for a contextual understanding of the political economy of the new enclosures and the labour regimes that emerge from them. Outcomes critically depend on the 'terms of inclusion' of local people in land deals (McCarthy 2010). Describing the expansion of oil palm plantations in Indonesia, John McCarthy argues that factors such as the functioning of smallholder development schemes, the form of democratic control over village institutions, the spatial pattern of villages and investments and the way land tenure systems and informal land markets work are all critical factors. Thus, depending on the context, local people may be included or excluded from land deals, and those included may be incorporated with either beneficial or adverse consequences, often with quite divergent outcomes occurring between one project and the next.

This relates to the way local political processes influence access to and control over land and production, and what Derek Hall *et al.* (2011) refer to as the 'powers of exclusion' – the interacting processes of regulation, force, the market, and legitimation that include or exclude people from land. Property and access are not, or not only, matters of land title and contract, but fundamentally 'matters of power and authority' (Sikor and Lund 2009, 1, cf. Peluso and Lund 2011).

The micro-politics of negotiations of land control, access and exclusion are played out at the local level, and this is where the livelihood consequences of land deals must be assessed. There has been less work at this scale, although the papers in this collection offer important insights. However, in its global survey, the World Bank (2010, xiv) reports that 'in most cases the expected job creation and net investment were very low', a finding shared by many other studies (e.g. Anseeuw *et al.* 2012, Oxfam 2012, Oakland 2011, IIED 2011). Claims about employment generation are often inflated, as in the case of oil palm plantations in Indonesia (Li 2011). Most of the emerging plantation enclaves are large-scale, industrial monocrop ventures that are generally labour-expelling/labour-saving, in contrast to earlier episodes of plantation agriculture which depended on the availability of large quantities of cheap manual labour.

As Lorenzo Cotula and his colleagues have described in a series of studies, land deal contracts are enormously variable, although with the common feature that local people and communities are rarely partners to the deal, and rarely consulted or even aware of them before they happen.[13] The distribution of benefits, costs and risks of any deal is also highly dependent on the nature of the 'business model',[14] and the associated implications for land ownership, access, control, employment and labour rights (Cotula 2011, Cotula and Leonard 2010, Vermeulen and Cotula 2010).

[13]Cotula and his team analyzed the contents of contracts for twelve land deals in seven African countries (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Senegal and Sudan); the contracts were generally made between host governments and foreign investors, with local landholders or communities, or their representatives, having no formal role at all (Cotula 2011).

[14]'Business model' is more or less the business-studies and business consultants' equivalent of 'labour regime'.

Borras and Franco categorize the direction and consequences of land deals across four broad 'types' of transformation in land use – food to food, food to biofuels, non-food to food, non-food to biofuels – each with different consequences for agrarian settings and different flows of land-based wealth and power. Some deals involve forms of redistribution, others distribution, others non-(re)distribution and others (re)concentration (Borras and Franco 2012). Using this schema, Ruth Hall (2011) shows for southern Africa that most deals involved a transition in land use from non-food to biofuels and a concentration of land, wealth and power in private companies.

Ruth Hall (2011) identifies a five-fold typology of institutional arrangements through which land deals are structured. All have important historical precedents, as well as contemporary incarnations; and all have different impacts and consequences in different contexts. First is an *extraction model* which involves the simple stripping of resources, a model that, like mining, is unsustainable in the long-term (Mackenzie 2006, 2009). Second is an *enclave model* involving outright takeover of land and related resources (perhaps displacing others) and the construction of related infrastructure, partly to provide inputs to and process output of a commercial enterprise, but also to provide the social and physical infrastructure required for commercial operations (Kydd and Christiansen 1982, Loewenson 1992). Such 'enclave economies' (Ferguson 2006) are poorly integrated into their surrounding society and economy,[15] but such isolation may act to focus investment and support in particular 'special' areas or zones with the idea being that in such areas growth will take off. Third is a *colonist model* involving the introduction of commercial operators who take over a block or area, as in the case of Zimbabwean farmers in Nigeria or Mozambique (Ariyo and Mortimore 2011, Hammar 2010). Such a model is familiar to the former settler colonies, where European farmers were allocated land as part of colonial occupation. Fourth is an *outgrower model* involving the development of processing facilities (usually with a commercially operated 'nucleus' estate), through which small producers under contract are incorporated into value chains (Porter and Phillips Howard 1997, Amanor 2008). Fifth, and finally, is a model of *commercialisation in situ*, in which small producers and other land users are incorporated into commercial value chains in the absence of any core estate or sometimes even any processing facility (Chalfin 2004, Amanor-Wilks 2009).

Each of these institutional arrangements differs dramatically, and there are many variations between these ideal types. They each have different implications for processes of incorporation or displacement of local land users; each involves different requirements for investment in infrastructure like roads and irrigation systems, as well as social investments such as schools and clinics; each has different requirements for labour, and so social and economic relationships between local land holders and each suggests different patterns of accumulation, appropriation and reinvestment in production. The last two models do not necessarily result in dispossession of local cultivators or changes in the forms of their access to land (although they may do, as in Julia and White 2012, this volume); they may rather amount to 'control grabs' without enclosure, in which investors source products from local producers under contract, rather than grabbing their land and establishing large-scale, industrial, wage-labour farms.

[15]The classic statement on agrarian (plantation) enclave models is Beckford (1972).

While for some purposes it is useful to extend the concept of 'land deals' to embrace deals governing (only) land use and not land access, in our view there are also important reasons not to downplay the importance and implications of enclosure and the actual corporate acquisition of land. Deals involving the large-scale purchase or long-term leasing of land are essentially permanent – when leasehold contracts of 35 or even 99 years expire, the land rights normally revert not to local people but to the state – and as already noted, local people are normally not even formal parties in these deals; contract farming deals, in contrast, do involve local cultivators as parties to the deal, and are not permanent. Such land grabs, therefore, close off irrevocably the option of a future return to smallholder tenure and smallholder farming, in the absence of mass 'grab land back' movements and redistributive land reforms. This is why, in a world where the penetration of corporate capital into agri-commodity chains may be inevitable and in some cases the only available source of needed investments, it is in our view very important to explore how this can be promoted and negotiated without the actual acquisition of land. As Chandrasekhar reminds us 'there are many different ways to release and extract resources and commodities [. . .] and appropriate surpluses from the less developed regions needed for accumulation of capital in the metropolitan centres' (2012, 612).

In this context, UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food Olivier de Schutter has argued consistently that 'the most pressing issue regarding investment in agriculture is not how much, but how: what we need is not to regulate land grabbing as if this were inevitable, but to put forward an alternative programme for agricultural investment' (De Schutter 2011, 250). These alternatives, he argues, must not be based on speculative large-scale acquisition of farmland, nor on the creation of a market for land rights based on individual titling, but on security of tenure, agrarian reform where land concentration has become excessive, and reorientation of agricultural systems towards agroecological modes of production that are both productive, sustainable and contribute to the progressive realization of the human right to adequate food. De Schutter therefore arrives at quite different principles for responsible agro-investment from those recommended by the World Bank or FAO (which we consider below).

> Land investments implying an important shift in land rights should represent *the last and least desirable option*, acceptable only if no other investment model can achieve a similar contribution to local development and improve the livelihoods within the local communities concerned (UN General Assembly 2010, 20. Emphasis added).

For these reasons it is important to explore the possibilities, advantages and disadvantages of various actually-existing 'business models' (labour regimes) linking local populations to agribusiness but not involving large-scale land acquisition, as Lorenzo Cotula and his colleagues have recently done. They have studied cases of contract farming, management and lease contracts, tenant farming and share-cropping, joint ventures, farmer-owned businesses, and upstream/downstream business links, looking at how value and influence are shared between the business partners, explored in four closely interlinked aspects: 'ownership' (of the business and of key assets), 'voice' (who takes/influences business decisions and how), 'risk' (how supply, production, market and other risks are shared between the parties) and 'reward' (sharing of economic costs and benefits, including market access, price setting, finance arrangements). They conclude that the impact on smallholders depends not so much on the form of the business-smallholder relationship as on how it functions in specific contexts: 'The willingness of the company to engage with more inclusive business models, as a genuine economic component of their business, rather than as a part of corporate responsibility programmes, is a key ingredient for more inclusive business models to work', and also – once again underlining the crucial role of politics and power - that 'the negotiating power of smallholders in their relations with government and agribusiness is also key' (Vermeulen and Cotula 2010, 7; see also Cotula and Leonard 2010).

In this context relations of labour are central: 'the truncated trajectory of agrarian transition in much of the global South, one in which there is no pathway from country to city, agriculture to industry, or even a clear pathway into stable plantation work that pays a living wage, is the crucial scale at which to review the land grab debate' (Li 2010, 66). The availability and quality of employment following land investments has major implications for the impacts of land deals on social differentiation, gender and age relations. This applies to all types of institutional arrangements following land deals, but perhaps especially to the 'outgrower' contract model. Past studies identify multiple impacts following the establishment of such agrarian contracts. These include widespread changes in rural social and class relations; the creation of new 'middle farmer' classes at the centre of new schemes; processes of differential accumulation and dispossession, resulting in the eviction of some and land size increase of others; highly gendered patterns of labour participation and wage levels, with women systematically disadvantaged; patterns of income increase but simultaneously declines in human development, including higher morbidity and lower nutrition due to lack of services; and broader processes of social dislocation from the places where people have historically come from (see contributions in Little and Watts 1994, White 1997, Julia and White 2012, this volume).

Asking searching questions of the sort identified above, and developing useful, operational typologies of both types and impacts of land deals will help move the debate about contemporary 'land grabbing' forward. This will hopefully promote a more firmly grounded analytical basis for the discussion, to date too often framed in terms of highly contrasting and polarized views, as we discuss in the next section.

## Regulation and resistance

There is currently much policy and political discussion about how to tackle the challenges brought about by global land grabs. There are two opposing positions (and a great diversity of positions in between). At one pole are those who think that corporate land acquisitions can be harnessed as opportunity for development (see, e.g. World Bank 2010, Deininger 2011). They are aware of the multiple problems that follow land deals: corruption, shady deals, people getting dispossessed and displaced, unfulfilled promises for jobs, and so on. However, it is assumed that these problems can be subject to regulation. Hence, the World Bank, FAO, UNCTAD and IFAD (2010) have proposed to adopt a set of principles for 'responsible' land investments. The World Bank group's seven 'Principles for Responsible Agro-Investment', for example, clustered along social, political and environmental issues are the following: respecting land and resource rights; ensuring food security; ensuring transparency, good governance, and a proper enabling environment; consultation and participation; responsible agro-enterprise investing; social sustainability; and environmental sustainability (World Bank 2010, x, 68-91).

But in the particular contexts where land deals are unfolding, will these make any difference at all? Why should we expect corporate agribusiness to act on a basis of voluntary corporate 'social responsibility'? Capitalist firms are not Boy Scouts, and they are unlikely to place moral codes and 'good governance' above the interests and demands of their owners or shareholders (White n.d.). Saturnino Borras Jr. and Jennifer Franco (2010) argue that the 'codes of conduct' position does not question the root causes of land grabbing, accepts that land grabbing is inevitable, assumes that large-scale investments benefit the poor and that large farms benefit small farms, that corporations will voluntarily self-regulate to advance social and environmental justice, and that transparent and participatory land grabs are better than non-transparent and non-participatory ones. Most fundamentally, as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has argued, to see the solution in terms of guidelines for the 'responsible' expansion of large-scale, capital-intensive farming is to narrow the terms of the debate and close the door to other alternatives (De Schutter 2011).

Large land deals most frequently occur where people do not have formal land rights, but they also occur across the whole range of property rights regimes: in state, public, community, common property and private lands, including in many recent land reformed lands as in the example of 11,000 ha of land in Isabela, Philippines acquired from land reform beneficiaries for the country's largest sugarcane ethanol plantation (Franco, Carranza and Fernandez 2011). This implies that securing land rights through formal private land title is no guarantee against land grabbing as is sometimes casually assumed.

The opposite pole is exemplified by *La Via Campesina*, today's largest and most important transnational agrarian movement representing small-scale farmers and poor peasants in the global South and North. In November 2011 *Via Campesina* and other allied civil society groups (NGOs, research think tanks, and so on) convened the international conference: 'Stop Land Grabbing Now!'. The resulting Mali Declaration against land grabbing underscores the critique of the fundamental assumptions and orientation of current land grabbing and large-scale industrial model of agriculture and the flawed assumption about the efficacy of corporate voluntary self-regulation (La Via Campesina 2011). Key to this position is the accompanying attempt to reframe the discourse around land investment which in the mainstream discourse has been interpreted only as 'corporate land investment'. Via Campesina and its allies are trying to bring two other types of land investments back on the agenda – state/public and small farmer land investments – to address what they see as a flawed 'there is no alternative' assumption. Like all agrarian struggles, this movement has multiple levels, and the local-national processes will prove to be key. Unfortunately, in all regions of the world it is at the local level that organized social movements are relatively thin and weak. While there is a need for more comprehensive and systematic empirical research on resistance, initial evidence from the field suggests a significant disconnect between the base of organized social movements and the key sites of land grabs. This often leads to competing and conflicting positions between organized social movements and their allied civil society groups on the one hand, and ordinary villagers actually affected by land deals on the other. Painstaking local community organization and mobilization work is perhaps the most urgent and difficult challenge.

There are numerous initiatives and groups navigating somewhere in between these two positions. One of these is the initiative around the now-approved

FAO-anchored Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security.[16] Negotiations for these Voluntary Guidelines have been politically complex, involving key state actors for or against stronger guidelines, as well as a range of civil society organizations and social movements with differentiated positions on land grabbing. Without complementary action from outside, it is likely that the Guidelines will be much weaker than hoped for by civil society groups. Their implementation will become a key arena of political contestation between key actors wanting to influence the institutional rules that govern land deals.

In trying to understand the dynamics between various positions among state and non-state actors, additional areas of contention are also important. Basic reform of investment frameworks which shift the balance between investors, national authorities and local land users is a priority. This will require a review of, for example, bilateral investment treaty legislation, as well as a more stringent application of equity, justice and development principles in investment financing and support by public aid agencies and banks.

Such policies also have a bearing on human rights. A rights-based framework, it is argued, must pay attention to rights of land holders subject to forced evictions, the foreclosure of land, the denial of information about deals, compensation arrangements and the prevention of local participation in political decisions all violate land users' human rights (De Schutter 2011, HLPE 2011). One strategy is to reorient agricultural investment away from land deals for large plantations or estates and towards small-scale family agriculture and markets, supported by stronger farmer voices (De Schutter 2011).

Thus besides analysing land deals and their consequences, parallel debates are needed on ways to increase the options and potentials of smallholder farming. This requires going beyond simplistic and flawed 'yield gap' calculations (which compare the productivity of long-neglected, resource- and infrastructure-starved peasantries with that of well-supported high-input agriculture) to the really relevant comparison: comparing the productivity, employment potential and long-term sustainability of industrial capitalist agriculture with that of a well-supported smallholder farming. A small farmer focus of course is not without its own problems; agrarian structures based on small-scale ('peasant') farming are inherently unstable under conditions of commodity economy, due to the in-built mechanisms of land concentration and agrarian differentiation, which many authors, from Lenin onwards, have described.[17] But these problems are not impossible to overcome, once we move away from fixations on private ownership titling to other forms of secure individual tenure, subject to maximum holdings and periodic redistribution.

As we have shown, the current policy debate has become polarised between adherents of an often simplistic 'win-win' scenario, where investors and local farmers benefit through new contracting arrangements, with land investments being seen as more an opportunity than a threat (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, 3–4, World Bank 2010) and those who see only danger and potential disaster, across economic, ecological and social dimensions (FIAN 2011, La Via Campesina 2011). The reality, as we have discussed, often fits neither of these poles, and a more nuanced analysis is

[16]For details see http://www.csm4cfs.org/policy_working_groups-6/land_tenure-6/ (accessed 30 April 2012).
[17]Summarised in Bernstein 2010, Ch. 7.

required, informed by the kind of agrarian political economy perspectives, and associated typologies, which we have outlined above. The contributions to this collection, which are introduced in the next section, offer examples of such an approach

## The contribution of this collection

The contributions to this collection cover a great diversity of the changes in broad agrarian structures that are fostering land deals; the 'newness' of land deals versus their continuity with earlier historical forms of appropriation; the ways in which existing patterns and processes of rural social differentiation – in terms of class, gender, ethnicity – are being shaped by changes in land use and land property relations, as well as by the re-organization of production and exchange; the impact of land deals on local level and national food security; the role of struggle or resistance and mobilization in shaping, negotiating and challenging the new land investment; the issues uniting or dividing the rural poor, organized movements, and rural communities around the issue of land deals; the various competing policy and political narratives and discourses around the multiple crises of food, energy, climate and finance, and their impact on or use in land deal negotiations; the ways in which competing narratives on land and property been deployed by various camps around the contested meanings of 'marginal lands' (or, idle', 'waste', 'unoccupied' lands); the emerging or continuing dynamics of power, elites and corruption, where land serves as a source of patronage; and the role of global land policies from different overseas development agencies – including the World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organisation, European Union, International Fund for Agricultural Development, and so on) in facilitating and encouraging, or blocking and discouraging, land deals.

Two framing papers explore global trends and how to understand them. Lorenzo Cotula (2012, this volume) addresses the 'geo-economics' of land deals, critically analyzing evidence of trends in scale and geography. While this analysis broadly corroborates some widespread assumptions, it also points to shifts in global-to-local economic and geopolitical relations linking sovereign states, global finance, agribusiness through to local groups. Understanding these, he argues, can help identify levers and pressure points for policy responses. Philip McMichael (2012, this volume) reflects on his own and his earlier co-authored work on food regimes, arguing that the 'new enclosures' are an expression of food regime restructuring, symptomatic of a crisis of accumulation in the neoliberal globalization project. Drawing on 'global ecology' and political economy, McMichael situates the land grab in the conjunctural crisis of capitalist ecology, expressed in climate, energy and food crises, which in turn are transforming the food and fuel regime.

Shepard Daniel (2012, this volume) addresses a largely unresearched issue, the international financing of land deals, providing a detailed analysis of the involvement of private equity funds in land deals. As well as documenting investment flows, she draws attention to the ways in which development finance institutions, especially the World Bank's International Finance Corporation, are promoting such deals, and reflects on the implications of speculative capital moving into land. She explores particularly the power relations embedded in this trend, exploring the information asymmetry and 'creative destruction' inherent in private equity finance, and their implications for governance and labour.

Four papers – all with an African focus – locate contemporary land deals within broader agricultural development strategies. Kojo Amanor (2012, this volume) analyses critically the prevalent tendency of neoliberal understandings of large-scale estate agriculture in Africa, as an 'aberration' brought about by Asian and Middle Eastern investors. Using the cases of cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire and pineapples in Ghana from the 1970s onward, he argues that land grabbing arises from the internal logic of agribusiness accumulation rather than from exogenous developments. Liz Alden Wily (2012, this volume) argues that both past and present land rushes have been based on, added to, and legitimized by legal manipulations which fail to recognize customary interests as real property rights, thereby legalizing the theft of lands of the poor or subject peoples. Phil Woodhouse (2012, this volume) focuses on the supply side of land deals in Africa specifically, placing the current enclosures in a longer historical context. He points out the ways in which the two dominant institutional models – large-scale mechanised farms and small-scale outgrower contract farming – respond to real productivity constraints, including water constraints facing rainfed agriculture and market-related risks. His contribution draws attention to the centrality of water considerations in land deals, and to the need for solutions to these constraints. Tom Lavers (2012, this volume), addressing the case of Ethiopia, contests the understanding of the 'land grab' as a neo-colonial process, and instead locates the expansion of foreign land-based investment within the Ethiopian government's export-led development strategy. His paper shows how macro benefits in terms of increased foreign exchange earnings come at the cost of increased risks at the micro level to people living in the vicinity of new investments, particularly politically marginal pastoral populations in remote regions.

Four papers highlight the intra-regional character of land deals, suggesting again that the widespread characterization of the new enclosures as a repeat of the colonial experience may be missing the mark. Rather, new actors, particularly emerging economies, are seeking out control of territory and natural resources in neighbouring states, often within the legitimating framework and discourse of regional integration. Oane Visser, Max Spoor and Natalia Mamonova point out that the existing literature has focused on the 'developing world' and has largely ignored the scale and significance of land deals in the former Soviet Union (2012, this volume). They contribute to rectifying this gap by documenting land deals in Russia, the legal and illegal acquisition strategies pursued by a range of investors, and they place these processes within the context of post-Soviet land reform and the forms of privatization which were key to enabling this later concentration of corporate property. Saturnino Borras Jr., Jennifer Franco, Sergio Gómez, Cristóbal Kay and Max Spoor (2012, this volume), summarize and reinterpret FAO studies from 17 countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region to show that land grabbing is occurring in this region to a greater extent than previously assumed. Key contexts for land deals include energy/biofuel ventures and climate mitigation strategies, and the resource demands of various newer hubs of global capital. Hallmarks of the process in this region are its intra-regional character, with (Trans) Lartin American Corporations playing a key role alongside traditional TNCs, and the rise of 'flex crops' such as sugar, soya and oil palm. Ruth Hall analyses the shifting role of South African farmers, agribusiness and capital on the rest of the continent, exploring the ideologies and discourses of legitimation employed in favour of them (2012, this volume). She documents the AgriSA farmers' move into Congo Brazzaville, and acquisitions by the two South African sugar giants, Illovo and Tongaat-Hulett, for outgrower and estate expansion elsewhere in the region. She argues that South Africa is no longer merely exporting its farmers, but also its value chains, to the rest of the continent, and that these deals that appear to be 'intra-regional' are increasingly reliant on external financing through transnational partnerships. Miles Kenney-Lazar (2012, this volume) documents the role of a Vietnamese corporation in what he argues is 'primitive accumulation' in Laos, as enclosure of 'freed up' land for timber extraction and plantation development prompts the semi-proletarianization of dispossessed communities.

Several papers explore the socially differentiated impacts of the new enclosures. Julia and Ben White (2012, this volume) document the gendered politics of monocrop oil-palm expansion in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. They show how dispossession from customary landholdings and the new contract farming system, based on registration of smallholder plots to 'household heads', has eroded women's independent tenure and rendered them a class of plantation labour – on the one hand offering the attractions of cash incomes and on the other hand locating them in new exploitative household and commodity relations. Sérgio Sauer and Sergio Pereira Leite show how the Brazilian government has responded to the global rush for farmland by re-establishing a legal mechanism for 'controlling' foreign investment in land deals (2012, this volume). They address the drivers of these investments and their consequences for both social relations and land values. Michael Levien argues that India's Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have become the epicentres of the country's 'land wars', with farmers resisting the state's attempts to transfer their land to private companies for developing these hyper-liberalized enclaves (2012, this volume). His analysis of this 'accumulation by dispossession' challenges David Harvey's (2003) understanding of the process as a means of absorbing over-accumulated capital in the global economy; rather, he argues that it is an extra-economic process through which states act as land brokers for capital, using eminent domain to overcome the barriers to accumulation posed by insufficiently capitalist rural land markets. While such development only minimally and precariously absorbs the labour of dispossessed farmers, it creates a peculiar agrarian transformation through land speculation that absorbs fractions of the rural elite, drastically amplifies existing inequalities, and fuels non-productive and pre-capitalist economic activity. Given the minimal benefits for rural India in this model of development, farmer resistance to land dispossession is likely to continue. Shelley Feldman and Charles Geisler's analysis of *in-situ* and *ex-situ* displacement in the *char* riverine and coastal regions and peri-urban regions in Bangladesh draws attention first to contestation over access to the rich alluvial soils of newly formed islands or *chars*, and susceptibility of small producers to dispossession from these shifting landscapes; and second, to new patterns of land capture in peri-urban areas, by elites who engage gangs, corrupt public servants and the military to coerce smallholders to relinquish title to their valuable lands. The multiple articulations of domestic land grabbing force us to examine displacement as an 'everyday', but widespread, long-term process rather than a cataclysmic event (Feldman and Geisler 2012, this volume).

Finally, as an antidote to all these analyses of land deals, dispossession and displacement, two contributions provide instructive 'dog that didn't bark'[18] cases of land grabs that have not happened. Using the lens of access and discourse theory Rebecca Smalley and Esteve Corbera (2012, this volume) argue that domestic actors have a greater influence on large-scale land deals than is assumed in neo-colonialist

[18]"Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?". "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time." "The dog did nothing in the night-time".

arguments. In the case of Kenya's Tana Delta, they show that top-down processes of land acquisition by powerful state-linked actors and supported by policy discourse can be stalled by local resistance, if rural people have strong customary claims and forge links with broader opposition. Thomas Sikor asks why private plantation companies and transnational corporations have not been able to find a foothold in Vietnam's growing tree plantation sector, which continues to be dominated by smallholders, supported by state policies which promote their access to land, finance and wood markets (Sikor 2012, this volume). It is both refreshing and strategic, as Olivier De Schutter (above) has underlined, not to close off the options and to remind ourselves that there are workable alternatives to corporate land accumulation and large-scale industrial farming.

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