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## **Resistance, acquiescence or incorporation? An introduction to land grabbing and political reactions ‘from below’**

Ruth Hall, Marc Edelman, Saturnino M. Borrás Jr., Ian Scoones, Ben White and Wendy Wolford

Political reactions ‘from below’ to global land grabbing have been vastly more varied and complex than is usually assumed. This essay introduces a collection of groundbreaking studies that discuss responses that range from various types of organized and everyday resistance to demands for incorporation or for better terms of incorporation into land deals. Initiatives ‘from below’ in response to land deals have involved local and transnational alliances and the use of legal and extra-legal methods, and have brought victories and defeats. The relevance of political reactions to land grabbing is discussed in light of theories of social movements and critical agrarian studies. Future research on reactions ‘from below’ to land grabbing must include greater attention to gender and generational differences in both impacts and political agency.

**Keywords:** dispossession; land grabbing; large-scale land acquisitions; land tenure; peasants; resistance; contentious politics; agrarian change

### **Introduction**

Critical scholarly analysis of processes of agrarian change has long emphasized peasant agency and aimed to uncover forms of resistance, even in the midst of dispossession, oppression and processes of social differentiation. This collection draws on the rich base of existing scholarship to ask: in the midst of the ‘global land grab’, what are the political reactions ‘from below’? While some reactions from people directly affected may involve resistance, the essays in this collection suggest that understanding the diversity of reactions from below requires critical empirical investigations of responses in specific situations. We thus frame ‘political reactions from below’ in a wider way, to refer to responses that extend far beyond ‘resistance’ in its many manifestations, and range from mobilizations seeking to improve the compensation for people’s expulsion from their land to demands to be inserted into land deals as workers or contract farmers to counter-mobilizations against land deal resisters. Beyond the local level, highly varied responses by societies and states at national levels and in international multilateral fora and transnational movements also call for more detailed and critical assessment by social scientists.

In the midst of enclosures and commercialization of land and other natural resources across the global South, tensions and synergies mark political reactions ‘from below’ to global land grabbing. A fuller understanding of the politics from below around land grabs brings us to some classic concepts in critical agrarian studies, including the dual front of ‘struggle against dispossession’ and ‘struggle against exploitation’, as well as

the question of the state. Yet even this classic political economy-based framing of people's struggles may not fully capture the range and complexity of the politics around contemporary enclosures where the ecological dimension has become increasingly prominent. But an important starting point is to draw on concepts and analytical tools in critical agrarian studies, such as *agrarian class politics* and *everyday forms of peasant resistance*. Analytical tools from *identity politics* will also be relevant in understanding politics from below around global land grabbing.

When land deals gain momentum, they trigger complex political dynamics – expected and unexpected, intended and unintended – within the state and in society. Early media reports, as well as activist and academic discussions, often assumed that land deals expel people from the land and that those expelled – typically referred to as 'local people' or 'local communities' – engage in 'resistance'. Recent research, however, indicates that what happens on the ground is more varied and complex (e.g. White et al. 2012; Wolford et al. 2013; Edelman, Oya, and Borras 2013). When land deals hit the ground, they interact with social groups within the state and in society that are differentiated along lines of class, gender, generation, ethnicity and nationality, and that have historically specific expectations, aspirations and traditions of struggle. These reshape, limit or make possible different kinds of land deals. As the contributions to this collection show, political debates and academic research have increasingly picked up *differentiated impacts* and *variegated political reactions* to land deals.

This collection addresses these questions and builds on a series of *Journal of Peasant Studies* (*JPS*) editions over the past five years that have interrogated the phenomenon of global land grabbing through the lens of critical agrarian studies. It brings together papers originally presented at the Global Land Grab II International Conference<sup>1</sup> organized by the Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI<sup>2</sup>). This follows a *JPS* Forum on Global Land Grabbing II which dealt with methodologies and the limits to existing approaches to enumerating, explaining and assessing the impacts of land deals (Scoones et al. 2013), and a *JPS* collection on *The New Enclosures: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Land Deals* (White et al. 2012) which drew together a broad spectrum of papers outlining the contours of the phenomenon, and which drew from the Global Land Grab I International Conference,<sup>3</sup> also organized by the LDPI. These in turn followed the first *JPS* Forum on Global Land Grabbing (Borras et al. 2011) which, ahead of the Global Land Grab I conference, outlined a research agenda for understanding the current land grab. This initial *JPS* collection of papers drew attention to the ways in which questions and approaches from within critical agrarian studies could help to systematize our knowledge and make sense both of the drivers of land grabbing and of the changes in agrarian economies and societies that land deals set in motion. The current collection aims to build on these contributions and to challenge dominant framings of rural and peasant communities across the global South as either passive victims or unified resisters of land grabs.

<sup>1</sup>The Global Land Grab II International Conference was held at Cornell University, 17–19 October 2012 (see <http://www.cornell-landproject.org/program/>).

<sup>2</sup>See the Land Deal Politics Initiative website ([www.iss.nl/ldpi](http://www.iss.nl/ldpi)).

<sup>3</sup>The Global Land Grab I International Conference was held at the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex, 4–6 April 2011 (<http://www.future-agricultures.org/events/global-land-grabbing>).

### Explaining resistance and its absence

Three broad models for explaining resistance and its absence dominate the scholarly literature: classical collective action paradigms, Marxism and heterodox theories of social movements. First, in classical collective action paradigms, resistance is viewed as an exception, and inaction as the norm. The ‘logic’ of this position derives from premises central to neo-classical economics and rational choice theory, namely that individuals strategically weigh potential benefits and risks of particular courses of action and then proceed in their own self-interest. Because risks of collective resistance tend to be high – lost time, arrests, beatings and assassinations – the calculating individual will likely sit on the sidelines as a ‘free rider’, hoping to reap the gains of others’ risk-taking and sacrifices. As Mancur Olson, the foundational theorist of this approach, argued, ‘When the class-oriented action Marx predicted does not materialize, it does *not* indicate that the economic motivation is not predominant, as some of his critics imply, but rather than there are *no* individual economic *incentives* for class action’ (Olson 1965, 108, original emphasis).

Second, Marxists (unlike Olson) have generally supposed that there is a direct line from shared grievances to collective action. While they acknowledge that some forms of resistance are individual, they tend to assume that common oppression gives rise to class politics and common political projects (Barker 2014). The Marxist canon is not, of course, entirely consistent on this issue, but its numerous lamentations about ‘false consciousness’, ‘hegemony’ or failure to recognize the collective’s ‘true’ – i.e. proletarian – interests are suggestive of lingering Hegelian teleological influences in Marxism.

Third, heterodox social movement scholars have taken issue with both the figure of the rational, calculating *Homo economicus* in collective action theories and the Marxist presumption of oppression inexorably producing proletarian consciousness and collective struggle. Some have pointed out, for example, that the notion of ‘free riders’, and the ‘collective action problems’ that these supposedly produce, is based on a vision of the isolated individual, lacking in kin, class, ethnic, religious, national or group identities and loyalties. When scholars belatedly began to analyze the role of emotion in social movements, they naturally found that affective ties and allegiances to other movement participants were an essential ingredient in mobilization and frequently accounted for why people unite and struggle in the face of daunting risks and unfavourable odds (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001). The Marxists’ bemoaning of ‘false consciousness’, similarly, gets turned on its head by the more perspicacious social movements theorists. Burdick (1995, 367), for example, argues that as soon as analysts’ gaze shifts from the ‘individual toward collective patterns’, it permits posing a ‘highly constructive political question: not why do people fail to come to the movement, but why is the movement failing to reach more people?’.

Critical agrarian studies and particularly research on struggles around land have made important – albeit frequently implicit – contributions to this theoretical discussion. Both Marxists (e.g. Hobsbawm 1959) and social movements theorists (e.g. Tilly 1986) posited a historical periodization of protest that distinguished ‘primitive’, ‘defensive’ and ‘pre-political’ mobilizations from those in the nineteenth century and after that aimed at seizing or at least influencing the state. Peasants’ ‘failure’ (for many Marxists) to manifest a proletarian consciousness in contention over land, or to transcend ‘defensive’ local struggles (for social movements theorists), became just one more indication of their atavistic politics and culture. When struggles for land are seen in their own terms, however, it is obvious that claiming land or defending the land one has often reflects clear class consciousness, albeit of a smallholding peasant rather than a proletarian character.

Of the papers in this collection, Natalia Mamonova's makes the most significant and original contribution to the discussion around the absence of resistance to land grabbing. In her analysis of contemporary Ukraine, now home to some of the largest farms in the world, Mamonova critiques the premises that resistance is the only or most likely response of rural people to large-scale land acquisitions, that peasants are incapable of adapting to or coexisting alongside large-scale industrial farms, and that 'ideological concerns about the "peasant way of life", food and land sovereignty dominate in peasant struggles'. As an alternative to these bedrock *a priori* assumptions of so much agrarian scholarship, she advocates analyzing the terms of inclusion in land deals (see also Borrás and Franco 2013), distinguishing between 'illusive inclusion' (where peasants, many of them elderly, receive land from the state and then rent it to commercial farmers), 'subordinate inclusion' (where peasants rent or lose land and then go to work on large holdings) and 'competitive exclusion' (where peasant farms are outcompeted by subsidized agroindustrial enterprises). In all three cases, collectively patterned individual choices lead in directions other than oppositional mobilization.

The outcomes Mamonova describes do not fit easily in any of the three broad explanatory frameworks outlined above. Ukrainian peasants are not eschewing collective action because they hope, à la Olson, to free ride on others' coattails. They are hardly a Marxian class 'for itself' in any meaningful sense. They have not remained unorganized because existing movements have failed to reach them. Mamonova intentionally shuns explanations for the lack of mobilization against land grabbing that rely on the negative legacies of 70 years of socialism (e.g. memories of the collectivization of agriculture, which was especially brutal in Ukraine, or ongoing fears of political repression). Nonetheless, her argument relies on a historically-informed reading of the current moment. Rural people in Ukraine, she says, perceive today's large farms as a continuation of Soviet collective and state farms – and refer to them as '*kolkhozy*' and '*sovkhozy*', respectively. The weight of pre-existing class relations still looms large. Employment on large farms, with their relatively high salaries and social wage, combined with income from tiny intensively-cultivated private plots, appears to be a congenial alternative, familiar from Soviet times and preferable to unequal and quixotic struggles with uncertain outcomes.

### **Class and identity politics, mobilizations and alliances**

Borrás and Franco (2013) suggest that understanding political reactions 'from below' to land deals requires both locating the dynamics in broader agrarian transformation processes and analyzing a main axis of political conflict. Let us look at the first question. When the land is needed but labour is not, the most likely outcome is the expulsion of people from the land (Li 2011). Those expelled may find jobs in other sectors of the economy. When they do not, land grabs are implicated in the creation of a 'relative surplus population'. On occasions when investors need the land and the labour, peasants and villagers are not expelled, but may be subsumed into corporate enterprises as workers (perhaps even leasing their land to their employer) or as contracted small-scale farmers.

The second question involves the axis of political conflict. There are three main types: poor people versus corporate/landed elites, poor people versus the state and poor people versus poor people (Borrás and Franco 2013; Borrás, Franco, and Wang 2013). There are many high-profile instances where poor people confronted corporate and landed elites, such as the infamous case of Kampong Sugar in Cambodia (IDI 2014). Relatively more common is a confrontation between affected villagers and the state, which can take the form of organized national mobilizations by agrarian movements, such as occurred in

the Philippines in 2006–2007 over the allocation of 1.4 million hectares of land to Chinese investors. The mobilizations in this case resulted in the cancellation of the investment agreements. Villager–state conflict may also take the form of ‘everyday forms of peasant politics’ or individual protests directed at the local state bureaucracy (Scott 1976); indeed, this is the most common form of land conflict in contemporary China (O’Brien and Li 2006). Probably the most frequent type of conflict is one that combines the first two: poor people versus corporate/landed elites and the state. This is not surprising, because the state is almost always implicated in the current land rush (Wolford et al. 2013). There is, however, the third axis: poor-on-poor conflict. From one land deal site to the next, we see social groups divided, not fully united, and with varied takes on engaging with land deals. While some may invoke the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) to justify opposition to a land deal, another group may use FPIC to justify their acceptance of and incorporation into it – a conflict usually instigated and fanned by those behind land deals (see Franco 2014). Poor-on-poor conflict is probably one of the most complex and sensitive dimensions of land deal-related conflict to research, especially for outsiders. The papers in this collection aim to redress this lacuna in the literature.

The two perspectives discussed above – the location of land deals in broader agrarian transformations and the axis of political conflicts – provide a clearer picture of what is actually happening on the ground, as several contributions to this collection illustrate. This framework also facilitates a critical examination of class and identity politics and of mobilizations and alliances for or against land deals. Such alliances – tactical or strategic – may link groups with a common objective that nonetheless have different or even competing class or other interests and ideological leanings. They may be alliances *against*, alliances *for* or alliances in the *struggles within* land deals. Typically, the boundaries between these three ideal types are porous and flexible, with individuals and groups changing positions all the time.

Social groups that were expelled or threatened with expulsion by land deals, or whose livelihoods are threatened more generally, do not automatically get organized and mount resistance. We know from classic literature on agrarian politics that there are triggers of and conditions for the emergence of these kinds of politics, and that the presence or absence of allies may be key to the kind of reaction that emerges ‘from below’.<sup>4</sup> Probably most of those who suffer from ‘unjust land deals’ do not openly resist. Mamonova (2015) has demonstrated this in the case in contemporary Ukraine (see also Visser et al. 2012). More commonly, adversely-affected groups engage in ‘everyday politics’ – individual covert and unstructured forms of contention, as in the case of Ethiopia (see Moreda 2015). The ‘rightful resistance’ type of defiance characteristic of most recent Chinese land conflicts – i.e. individual, unorganized but noisy and overt protest (O’Brien and Li 2006) – may be gaining ground in places outside China, such as Vietnam (Kerkvliet 2014). Gingembre (2015), for example, analyzing local resistance to a land deal in Madagascar, highlights the role of an alliance that involved key state and non-state actors from local to international levels in the issue-analysis and demand-making processes among affected social groups. External allies often are elites themselves, such as legal experts who know both national and international laws and how these can be employed to reinforce subaltern claims, as in the Colombian case examined by Grajales (2015). In confronting the global land rush, local agrarian groups frequently find allies among the ranks of other social

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<sup>4</sup>For competing explanations, see Popkin (1979) and Scott (1976), as well as Wolf (1966), Paige (1975) and Fox (1993).

justice movements, such as the labour, women's, environmental, food and human rights movements.

But not all mobilizations and alliances are against land deals. Sometimes social groups in local communities mobilize, seek allies and demand to be inserted *into* land deals. Larder (2015) shows that in the iconic case of the Malibya land deal in Mali, which involved at least 100,000 hectares, sectors of the local rice-farming population sought integration into the project. Similarly, in the case of the Ecofuel sugarcane investment in northern Philippines, which involves 11,000 hectares, a significant number of those affected have mobilized and forged alliances with local and national government agencies to participate in the enterprise by renting out their land or engaging in contract growing schemes, or as plantation workers (Franco, Carranza, and Fernandez 2011; Alano forthcoming).

Long histories of government neglect and a lack of alternative livelihood possibilities suggest institutional and structural bases for these efforts at incorporation. Typically, local communities that see no state support forthcoming are told that corporate investment is the only option for their livelihoods, whether this is explicit, as in the Philippines case, or not, as in the case of Mali. The subtle forms of coercion also have a clear class basis. The Philippine case involves poor peasants who do not have other livelihood alternatives and who welcomed the investment (Franco, Carranza, and Fernandez 2011) in direct opposition to other members of their community and their outside allies, who are opposed to the investment project (Alano, forthcoming). This is a classic poor-on-poor conflict around land deals, and it is not an isolated case. In many conflicts, smallholders whose subsistence is threatened by a land deal, absentee plot holders who gladly agree to lease land to investors, and landless and migrant workers rejoice at the entry of corporations that promise to provide employment. Obviously, class interest does not automatically translate into class politics.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, class is not the only factor that shapes political contention from below. Other intersecting identities are equally important: gender, generation, ethnicity, race, caste, religion and nationality (Edelman 1999). Additional fissures may separate those with or without formal claims and those potentially entitled to land or not under particular laws (see Grajales 2015). This intersection brings both synergies (as we see alliances forged between peasants and indigenous peoples) and tension (as when divisions arise within and between peasant and indigenous communities) (see Brent 2015; Alonso-Fradejas 2015, and Fontana 2014).

Struggles around land deals are not just either for or against land deals. Important struggles by the working class are fought *within* land deals – to (re)negotiate the *terms of their incorporation* into the emerging enterprises, whether as workers (through labour justice demands) or as contracted small farmers (through agrarian justice or environmental justice demands). Few systematic studies have addressed this theme. Pye (2010), however, has noted the diversity among civil society groups working on the issue of palm oil, based on their distinct ideological and political locations within and between labour, agrarian and environmental justice movements. The Chikweti forestry project in the northern province of Niassa in Mozambique is an important case illustrating a complex response by local people to investments, which is neither for nor against land deals, but rather squarely in the category of struggles *within* land deals. Here, social groups in local communities are demanding more jobs within the enterprise alongside continued access to their plots for subsistence production (FIAN 2012). These situations raise difficult political dilemmas: when a

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<sup>5</sup>For a general discussion with reference to India in the context of Green Revolution, see Byres (1981).

situation is acceptable in terms of labour justice, but not in terms of agrarian justice; when it is acceptable in terms of agrarian justice, but not in environmental justice terms, and so on (Borras and Franco 2012, 56–57). These dilemmas are partly manifestations of the intersection of class and identity, a theme central to this collection and addressed to varying extents by the different contributors.

### **Transnationalization and diffusion: responses from the local to global**

Mobilizations around land deals are animated by a range of state and societal actors at different levels: local/subnational, national and international. At times, political contention arises from local social groups and their efforts to find international and national allies – whether against, for, or within land deals (see Gingembre 2015 on Madagascar). At other times, political campaigns originate among international groups and diffuse to local–national levels, as Corson et al. (2015) show in relation to alliances on climate justice. The *origin* of political contention is important because it tells us about the dominant framing of the issues and demands, while the *trajectory* is important as it may reveal the strategies and objectives of campaigns. Real-life politics, of course, are not as neat as we suggest here; real situations are probably more about the convergences and unique configurations of various actors seeking allies than assumptions about one-way internationalization or diffusion (see Edelman and Borras forthcoming).

Larder (2015) demonstrates how the difficult dilemmas outlined above can manifest in conflicting narratives and claims among civil society groups working on land grabbing issues. Concretely, she identifies a group of poor rice farmers mobilizing to be incorporated into the Malibya project who would never think about it as a ‘land grab’, while international social movement organizations claim it is an iconic land grabbing case and seek to stop and roll it back. These local and international groups described by Larder are both likely on solid moral ground – which is why such cases raise troubling political dilemmas and why there are competing interpretations of the same or similar cases. These interpretations frame divergent responses. International civil society organizations tend to demand land reform as the most appropriate response to land grabbing. While this overarching frame will gain political traction in societies marked by highly unequal distribution of access to and ownership of land, the same does not occur in communities with customary tenure or in pastoralist societies, as in much of Africa (Kandel 2015; see Borras, Franco, and Monsalve Suarez 2015 for a broader context).

Not all urgent land issues today are about ‘land grabbing’. Pre-existing concentration is just as pervasive and compelling as the post-2007 enclosures. Some civil society groups mobilize around land issues, but not necessarily around current land grabs. The coming together of key civil society actors in a common campaign may not be as easy as activists might wish. One key centre of gravity in international agrarian justice campaigns today is the ‘Peasants’ Rights’ process within the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC). It is framed broadly and strategically, and not on the urgent and narrow issue of land grabs. The subjective forces behind the process are not all engaged in the anti-land grabbing campaigns, and vice versa – despite the fact that their campaigns are closely related (Edelman and James 2011).

### **Enclosures versus integration: dilemmas of adverse incorporation**

The global land grab has been widely represented as an enclosure dispossessing local people – often peasant or family farmers – and privatizing and commodifying common

property resources such as rangelands, water and forests. Yet land grabs are not all about displacement and expulsion. Since the term ‘land grab’ became mainstream shorthand denoting the corporate scramble for land and water, it has become apparent that much of what has been included under this rubric does not involve corporations taking direct control of land. Rather, as this collection shows, more complex processes are underway, with new value chains emerging, often as family farmers are induced to take up cash-crop production on contract for processing companies.

Discussing the centrality of labour in understanding land grabs and their effects, Li (2011) asked, ‘What happens when the land is needed and the labour is not?’ Here we need to invert the question: What happens when the land is needed *and* the labour is needed? In such contexts, capital tends to incorporate rather than exclude. Some have questioned the term ‘land grab’ in cases where farmers have been incorporated into corporate agribusiness, not only because accumulation proceeds without dispossession but also because peasants actively seek incorporation into new corporate value chains. Such processes may not involve ‘enclosure’ or ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2005). Yet, even in the absence of dispossession, the penetration of corporate capital into rural economies may nonetheless have profound impacts on class formation and commodity relations.

Why does dispossession not always occur? Reasons may include the existing tenure regime, state restrictions on the terms of corporate penetration, and the interests of companies seeking flexible investments and risk-sharing. In Chiapas, Mexico, as Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen (2015) point out, the *ejido* system provided secure tenure for farmers and limited the expansion of oil palm companies, forcing them to engage with peasant farmers. Mamonova (2015) argues similarly that ‘the way land tenure systems and informal markets work, the type of land investments, and the implementation of small-holder development schemes in villages are critical factors that influence the exclusion or inclusion of local people in land deals’.

The ‘land grab’ thus involves not only displacement of populations, but also the extension of value chains and corporate control over production and territories. The extension of domestic and global capital in controlling land and its uses might, drawing on Peluso and Lund (2011), be more accurately termed ‘land control grabbing’ rather than ‘land grabbing’ *per se*. The terms of inclusion are, as a result, crucial, and may be on more or less adverse terms. Peasant attitudes to land grabs, then, may be conditioned by the ‘terms of inclusion’ (McCarthy 2010). Central to understanding these processes is the concept of ‘adverse incorporation’ (Hickey and du Toit 2007) – in other words, the manner in which people may be incorporated into corporate agribusiness and even global value chains while simultaneously being excluded from processes of capital accumulation. The term ‘adverse incorporation’ itself draws attention to the exploitative character of such relations even where people seek inclusion in them, and so redirects attention to the structural transformations underway and their relationships to reactions and responses from below.

Such distinctions between enclosure and incorporation, specifically through contract farming, have been extensively documented and analyzed even outside and prior to the current land rush. In much of Africa, a long history of failed attempts at establishing large-scale commercial farming – through coercion as well as direct or indirect subsidies – has seen contract farming and outgrower schemes emerging as a key way in which peasants have been incorporated in circuits of capital accumulation (Little and Watts 1994; Oya 2012; Baglioni and Gibbon 2013). Contract farming is one solution to the problems of sourcing and disciplining labour while extending the territorial reach of corporate capital. Even in the absence of dispossession, such incorporation may produce social differentiation

processes similar to those arising from enclosure and dispossession, as families with more resources and larger landholdings may be better able to reap the benefits of contract farming and emerge as medium- or large-scale producers, while others may enter into debt, may experience land loss and may or may not be incorporated as wage labour (Smalley 2013).

Land deals that start out as enclosures can also be transformed, sometimes in response to resistance, to incorporate rather than exclude local farmers. This is evident in the Malibya project, where resistance and bad publicity prompted state authorities to make some of the irrigated land in the new canal system available to local rice farmers (Larder 2015). Such efforts underscore the ways in which ‘reformist’ positions by farmers’ associations and social movements may preserve or promote production by family farmers even while locating this within corporate agriculture (see Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011). Incorporation, even on less-than-adverse terms, does not challenge the overarching direction of agrarian change or the wider structures of capital within which it may be located. As Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen (2015) emphasize, the ‘overemphasis on enclosure limits our understanding of the ways capitalism impacts rural livelihoods and environments’. To deepen our understanding of the agrarian transformations underway, more analysis is needed about ‘how and why rural people engage with capitalism’. Addressing the ways in which land deals incorporate local people – who, how, why and on what terms – can help us to understand what conditions responses, including resistance of various kinds as well as the absence of resistance, and so deepen our critical inquiry into the global land grab.

### **Engagements with the state**

Scholarly and activist work on land grabbing initially had a Manichean perspective on the state. Nation-states were either ‘target countries’, too weak to defend their borders from the threat of foreign investment, or ‘host countries’, either directly sponsoring land grabs through state-owned enterprises or indirectly sponsoring them by providing infrastructure for accumulation. As scholars and activists alike grappled with the dynamic phenomenon of land grabbing across regions and historical periods, their research has proven the Manichean perspective to be problematic. Land grabbing has provided an impetus and opportunity for an increasingly sophisticated body of research on relationships between states, governance and authority over land (Margulis, McKeon, and Borrás 2013; Wolford et al. 2013). The papers in this collection make several contributions to this discussion.

States are not coherent, unified entities that consistently act with premeditation, competence or consensus. They contain multiple actors, factions and interests, many of which are in direct competition for political influence. As Milgroom’s paper (2015) on Mozambique demonstrates, policies may be crafted at a high level but their effects depend on how they are implemented or, as she says, how they are ‘enacted’. In Mozambique, government officials deploy sophisticated technologies, such as remote sensing and global positioning systems (GPS), to gather and present data, but they often do so in an ‘ad hoc fashion’ so that the seemingly scientific results suit their particular interests. Competing forces within the state are not always easy to see, since official discourses tend to project an artificial coherence. Corson et al.’s paper on the Rio+20 meetings suggests that the most effective sites for seeing and enacting governance – at the national and international levels – are informal, everyday spaces rather than official texts or meeting halls. Corson et al. (2015) quote a participant at Rio+20 as saying, ‘A lot of the UN negotiation never really happens on the floor; it always happens in the corridors ... So we sit one on one ... catch them when they’re going to the toilet, or when they’re walking to coffee’.

A common division within the state, highlighted by several of the papers, occurs between officials at local, regional and national levels. Competition between these actors sometimes provides opportunities for land deals to move forward but may also create the political space or opportunity for resistance. Moreda's paper (2015) on land deals in lowland Ethiopia indicates that contemporary investment needs to be situated in a long history of domination in the lowlands by national (highlander) and foreign (Sudanese) elites. Partly to remedy this history of subordination, the 1995 Ethiopian constitution devolved considerable power to states to administer their own land. With the recent rise in land values, however, the national government has again become involved in local land affairs, not least through a highly disruptive programme of villagization. In a paper on Colombia, Grajales (2015) makes a different but related point, suggesting that while the national government has devolved power to local regions and elites, this has given rise to 'subnational authoritarianism' and made it more difficult for villagers to fight dispossession.

At times, differences between levels of the state are exacerbated by transnational commitments. In the papers in this collection, the importance of notions of universal human rights, identity and land use are especially salient. In Argentina, Brent's paper (2015) suggests, provincial governments privilege the sanctity of private property while the national government privileges territorial, cultural or ethnic claims to land. As a result, indigenous land titles are promised by the national government and undermined by the provincial government. Differences between local- and national-level officials do not necessarily preclude collaboration. Moreda (2015) highlights, in Ethiopia, ongoing partnerships between local chiefs and central authorities, where the chiefs maintain their positions by exploiting their own communities and kin. In some cases, the central state appears absent altogether, leaving local authorities considerable space to govern, as in Mamonova's account (2015) of land deals in post-socialist Ukraine.

States also change their orientations, as Wilson's study of the *Las Tunas* movement in Nicaragua suggests. In the 1980s, the revolutionary Sandinista state distributed over 2.5 million hectares of land to farming collectives, individual peasant farmers and state-owned enterprises, but after the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) – the Sandinistas – lost the 1990 presidential elections, many aspects of these reforms were reversed. In a paper on Special Economic Zones in the Indian state of Goa, Sampat (2015) similarly indicates that states need to be seen as contested sites in which 'land grabbers don't always win'. In Goa, mobilization by a cross-class, cross-society coalition led to the cancellation of 15 approved SEZs, some of which had already begun to develop the land.

Working with rather than directly confronting state authority may also be effective for those too remote and marginal to mount direct resistance to threatened dispossession. In Laos, an ethnic-minority Khmu community invoked state development discourses to challenge a concession to a Chinese company that intended to plant rubber trees on over half their territory (McAllister 2015). This state attempt to allocate community land for commercial purposes was justified with arguments that the land was degraded and formed part of 'state forests'. The reactions 'from below' ranged from 'anonymous acts of sabotage, refusal to work for the company, identification of powerful allies in the government and civil society, and recourse to law and state institutions'. Informed by perceptions of risk and opportunity, this Khmu community was able to stall the planned plantation by working with state structures in a process that underlines the degree to which forms of resistance are often unrecognized as such, occurring as they often do in remote locations far from public view.

Understanding reactions to land deals in geographically remote locations is a theme also highlighted by Martiniello (2015). He locates community reactions to an impending land deal in northern Uganda within a long history of resistance to central state control and efforts to establish commercial agriculture, from colonial times to the present, in a region that is economically and geographically peripheral to the Ugandan state. He shows how the Ugandan government's attempt to provide land for a sugar plantation to the Madhvani Group provoked a range of social struggles that echo and are locally understood as building on this history of resistance to state authority and violence. Here, too, responses 'manifested in both everyday, hidden, practices of resistance and moments of open, militant, contestation [that] are aimed at (re)establishing and securing access to means of social reproduction'. Cumulatively, these diverse forms of resistance represent both opposition to an imminent dispossession and claims to land sovereignty and autonomy.

As a collection, the papers also highlight the importance of seeing states as relationships rather than discrete institutions. States are grounded in particular places and times and are constituted through relationships with society. And just as there are multiple perspectives within the state, there are multiple relationships between state and society. The border between the two is dynamic and porous; state actors are often civil society actors and vice versa in different times or spaces. Protestors or actors who work closely with the state sometimes have more influence over land deals than those who work 'outside'. As Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen (2015) point out for Chiapas, 'Environmentalists within the state were able to make a concrete difference while radical organizations outside the state were never able to build alliances'. At the same time, both Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen as well as Corson et al. show how state-society collaboration can discipline the latter, such that civil society is always just that – 'civil' – and playing by existing rules of the game.

In democracies, a key component of state-society relationships is the electoral process and, in most of the cases analyzed in the papers, elected politicians manifest responsiveness to popular discontent. Gingembre's contribution (2015) on Madagascar shows this, albeit in a very particular way:

Political uncertainty in the wake of the coup against the Ravolmanana government provided more space for civil society, which organized quickly because of empowerment and a sense of having 'missed the boat' during the [2009] Dae Woo [anti-land grab] protests.

Gingembre indicates that the timing of parliamentary elections made 'officials even more sensitive to the whiff of protest' but, ironically, this sensitivity was so influenced by memories of the 2009 coup that local leaders disregarded those people who would have liked to be involved in the Lalifuel land deal. Wilson (2015) argues that in Nicaragua, elected leaders were forced to cede to mobilization once the images of protest focused more on the daily trials of survival than on military or guerrilla war: 'The material reality of hungry children and hungry women struggling to feed them established some credibility of the movement within the media outlets and created a powerful symbol with which to shame the government'. Sampat's (2015) research in Goa similarly suggests that successful negotiations with the state hinged on the electoral – and physical – power of the people.

### **Rights and legal repertoires**

Can contesting land grabs through invoking 'rights' and legal repertoires stop or reverse them? Several of the papers in this collection explore how people in diverse situations

have used the language of rights and legal institutions to advance their struggles. Many states do not adequately protect customary and informal land tenure in their statutes, so land deals that dispossess people of such rights can be legal under national law, even while violating human rights principles (Wily 2012). Efforts led by states and elites to reform, formalize, individualize and register land and property can legalize theft of poor people's land. While neoliberal institutions and theorists (e.g., de Soto 1989) frequently hail property deeds as protection for the very poor, in historical perspective formal titles are also a central tool in land rushes (Wily 2012). Several assertions used in prior rushes are again evident in the past decade, including the notion that unfarmed lands are vacant 'wastelands', that customary and informal occupation does not confer rights, and that mass individualization and titling programmes should be at the centre of state land policy. The result is that land deals often proceed in 'legally binding' ways that protect the rights of investors and elites, but not those of the rural poor. In the face of these threats, social movements have adopted diverse positions, either contesting the legal terrain or rejecting state power as anathema to their interests.

The move towards legalizing land titles has been used to ambiguous effect in different contexts. Alonso-Fradejas' paper on Guatemala after the mid-2000s argues that national land titling programmes, originally seen as a 'good governance fix', were increasingly used to provide factors of production for 'well-capitalized outsiders'. The illegal appropriation of titles, he indicates, paved the way for elite resource accumulation and concentration. Grajales (2015), however, describes a Colombian case in the Lower Atrato where collective organization allowed a community to resist displacement and win meaningful collective land rights. Gingembre (2015) raises a complementary point and suggests that in Madagascar formal legal norms were less important than the content of claims to land based on 'customary, local discourses and identities'. Brent (2015) suggests, similarly, for Argentina, that legal ownership may be less important than control. The Argentinean state has made media headlines for restricting foreign land ownership in the wake of concerns over land appropriation, but the focus on ownership obscures the more important aspect of who actually controls the land and its production. This extinguishes grassroots voices and livelihoods even more effectively than outright ownership in a context where power derives from force rather than consent.

In many countries, the absence of democratic local land governance institutions constitutes a major stumbling block. There are exceptions, however, as in Tanzania, where village councils established through Nyerere's Ujamaa policy administer land at the local level. The 'rights' approach and the use of formal legal institutions are perhaps most effective in collective resistance to large land deals, rather than smaller and more localized ones. Nonetheless, local elites and politically-connected national businesses often grab significantly more land – at least cumulatively – than transnational actors do (Jayne, Chamberlin, and Headey 2014; Kandel 2015).

Critiques of the global land grab initially focused largely on rights violations: land dispossession and displacement of people from land they considered they owned. Concern with rights violations prompted a proliferation of regulatory initiatives to complement and shape national laws. At the global level, the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) *Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* ('Voluntary Guidelines') are the most comprehensive, and are the outcome of several years of intense negotiation between states, civil society and development agencies (FAO 2012). While 'voluntary', the Guidelines reference existing binding international law and human rights norms, and so constitute the most definitive global framework regarding land and related natural resource rights. The seven

*Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment* (RAI), endorsed by the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the UN Council on Trade and Development, on the other hand, are a framework for self-regulation by investors. Following the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines, the CFS initiated consultations that gave rise to *Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and the Agro-food System* (FAO 2014 – the ‘CFS–RAI’) as an alternative to the World Bank-sponsored RAI.

The political and ideological bases of alliances and campaigns both unite and divide the ranks of actors working around land deals, giving rise to three main approaches to regulating land grabbing: regulate to facilitate, regulate to mitigate negative impacts and maximize opportunities, and regulate to block and roll back land grabs (Borras, Franco, and Wang 2013). Agrarian social movements such as La Vía Campesina and critical agrarian scholars have debated how to respond to this ‘land governance rush’ and whether these frameworks can gain traction. Controversies centre primarily on three issues. First, were the guidelines premised on human rights and property rights (as in the Voluntary Guidelines) or self-regulation by corporate investors (as in the RAI)? Second, what were the roles of civil society, farmer associations and social movements in the process of developing these frameworks, and how legitimate and inclusive are the results? While civil society and farmers’ groups were integrally involved in drafting the Voluntary Guidelines, the RAI were the product of the development agencies themselves, led by the World Bank. The third question was the extent to which these frameworks address only procedural questions of governance and transparency – to make land grabbing ‘responsible’ – or whether they provide a basis for more substantive forms of agrarian change (Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011).

What partly explains the momentum that the CFS has gained among progressive and radical social movements, such as the International Planning Committee (IPC) for Food Sovereignty and La Vía Campesina, is that the Voluntary Guidelines cut across broad ‘resource control’ issues and invoke a variety of international laws and treaties. They are an international governance instrument that can be flexibly used by those confronted by corporate land grabs (White et al. 2012), green grabs (Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones 2012) and water grabs (Mehta, Veldwisch, and Franco 2012) – as well as by those who are outside the ambit of the global land rush (Seufert 2013; McKeon 2013; Monsalve 2013). How and within what framework to bring together all social forces confronting a variety of land questions, and not just those directly provoked by the current land rush, is an urgent political question for all those who work around social justice issues, and an urgent agenda for inquiry by ‘engaged researchers’.

Do human rights frameworks serve as an effective tool in local struggles? Very few of the contributions in this collection suggest that transnational governance has had any real influence. It is too early to tell if the Voluntary Guidelines or other international instruments will have any effect, or if the transnational scale is one better suited to framing issues than to adjudicating conflicts. Franco’s discussion of FPIC demonstrates both the potential and pitfalls of depending on a regulatory tool with limited authority (Franco 2014).

Rights frameworks in international law often coexist with national laws as well as local practices that contradict them. Alonso-Fradejas (2015) draws attention to how, in Guatemala, the ‘repertoire of contention’ included strategic litigation as a form of ‘politico-judicial advocacy “from above”’ alongside ‘grounded practices of resistance “from below”’. Despite obvious limitations, he argues, as long as the state remains an arena of contention, legal repertoires can be put to work. Invoking human rights frameworks, peasants in Colombia have simultaneously recognized the institutionalized violence of the state and taken their struggles to state institutions and the judiciary (Grajales 2015). Here, both investors and rural people resisting them have engaged in ‘legal contention’. The

Colombian experience represents a paradox where widespread lawlessness and violence either inflicted or condoned by the state and corporations exists alongside legal institutions that, while constrained by this wider political economy, offer some opportunities for legal remedy.

This ‘judicialization’ of politics may not necessarily entail the displacement of political struggles into legal institutions, but rather a more complex navigation of multiple avenues of struggle. In Colombia, the association of corporate interests with paramilitaries, drug traffickers, money laundering and extra-judicial killings has led rural populations to respond with direct resistance and with legal strategies aimed at establishing land grabbing not only as a property infringement issue but as a human rights one (Grajales 2015). In such situations, international human rights instruments, such as the CFS Voluntary Guidelines, may provide important leverage for resistance. Human rights-based responses to global land grabbing can gain traction only through a concerted effort by state and non-state actors operating at international, national and local levels (Golay and Biglino 2013). For effective use of legal repertoires, whether in national courts or multilateral fora, mass mobilization and pressure from below are essential.

### **Green politics from below**

Linked to wider concerns over ‘land grabbing’ are forms of resistance around environmental issues. The ‘financialization’ of nature and resources – widespread in contemporary neoliberal capitalism (Büscher et al. 2012) – involves imposing ‘environmental’ agendas around such labels as ‘green economy’, ‘low-carbon transitions’ or ‘sustainable intensification’. The expansion of quasi-privatized national parks, tourist zones and other ‘protected areas’ is part of this, as are ‘payment for ecosystem services’, biodiversity offsets or the promotion of biofuels or carbon forestry schemes in the name of climate change mitigation (Matondi, Havnevik, and Beyene 2011; McAfee 2012; Dietz et al. 2014; Leach and Scoones 2015). Collectively, these phenomena have often been described as ‘green grabbing’ – ‘the appropriation of land and nature for environmental ends’ (Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones 2012, 238). But just as with ‘land grabbing’, ‘green grabs’ take multiple forms and result in diverse politics from below, as several papers in this collection point out.

The expansion of oil palm plantations for biofuels in Guatemala (Alonso-Fradejas 2015) represents a classic ‘agrarian extractivist project’, like those in much of the land and green grab literature. The ‘repertoires of contention’ range from the everyday to the more structured. Long histories of agrarian politics give rise to these patterns of resistance and the contests between different actors as a result of the intervention. Resistance has emerged across diverse axes as Q’eqchi lowlanders articulate a discourse around ‘the defence of territory’. This promotes indigenous identity and a sense of community, and also generates support for local land use and agricultural practices. This language facilitates alliances with human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Catholic Church and others, in turn nurturing multiple forms of politics from below.

Yet oil palm development does not always result in confrontational politics when embedded in smallholder settings. Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen (2015) offer a contrasting case from Chiapas, Mexico, where a state-supported oil palm programme has involved smallholders and indigenous peoples. In this instance, peasant engagement with capital accumulation has undermined environmentalists’ efforts to restrict the spread of oil palm. Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen argue that ‘a green agrarian question solely focusing on enclosure is unable to explain agrarian environmental processes’. Large-scale land grabs may involve the willing co-optation of peasant producers, who are then

able to improve their livelihoods. In this case, radical environmental organizations that used global green narratives around climate change, biodiversity and land-use change were unable to forge coalitions at the local level to resist oil palm. Instead, actors within the state forged alliances that adopted environmental arguments, but linked these to the oil palm project and the interests of local producers and indigenous peoples. By reconfiguring old forms of clientelist politics, the oil palm programme created a new network of support, involving actors within and outside the state. No classic oppositional politics emerged, but rather one rooted in much more complex engagements with the state and capital that would be obscured by a simplistic focus on enclosure and ‘grabbing’.

Similarly, Cavanagh and Benjaminsen (2015) explore the ‘biopolitics’ of protected areas and the dispossessions these provoke. Focusing on the case of conservation initiatives at Mount Elgon in Uganda, they identify responses that include nonviolent, militant, discursive and formal-legal tactics. In this case, and more broadly, they argue, rural populations faced with enclosure of farmlands and rangelands respond not only with overt resistance but through illicit cultivation in territories earmarked for conservation – a kind of ‘guerrilla agriculture’. These reactions do not merely represent survival strategies by supposedly passive victims of land enclosure but form a part of struggles in the face of direct and indirect violence to establish spheres of existence autonomous of both conservation authorities and the national state. In these ways, they ‘circumvent policies that bolster the global public good of biodiversity at the expense of local and traditional livelihoods’ and challenge the ‘naturalization of dispossession’.

Rocheleau (2015), in a paper on Chiapas, analyzes the use of ‘networked, distributed, rooted and territorial power’ – by investors and by resistance movements – around a number of ‘green’ investments, including a major tourism project. Again, compared to classic ‘land grabbing’, there is a ‘fog of greening’, involving networked assemblages spread across a wide territory. The network of actors promoting such investments links tourism to reserves, and connects the state, security forces and corporate investors. State agents regularly foment rural violence, and the process of ‘restoring order’ provides a pretext for evictions that make an area ‘safe’ for investment. Rocheleau maintains that ‘Disneyland in the forest and Cancún in the forest are a prelude to pipelines in the forest, plantations in the forest, high-ways in the forest, paradise for sale in the forest’ and more.

‘Politics from below’ and resistance to green discourses and practices may not always occur, however. In a ‘collaborative event ethnography’ of the Rio+20 conference in 2012, Corson et al. (2015) show how opponents of the ‘green economy’ discourse mobilized in an international setting. NGOs, mostly from the global South, energized a movement inside and outside the UN process, labelled ‘rights at risk’, and deployed multiple forms of mobilization, such as ‘side-events, morning meetings, thematic clusters, letters, petitions and protests’. The ‘green economy’ became the key signifier in debates at Rio and many viewed it as ‘selling nature to save the economy’, invoking crisis and scarcity to create new forms of privatization of nature, and thus conditions for ‘green grabbing’. The ‘rights-at-risk’ movement made some headway, though Corson et al. (2015) observe that ‘it is not always through the official structures of participation or orchestrated resistance that progressive action takes place’. Instead, it may be that change happens through ‘unforeseen moments of opportunity’.

These papers show how so-called ‘green grabs’ involve enclosure and expropriation of land and resources, but the politics of contestation around environmental questions may also operate in more complex and subtle ways, through networked forms of resistance and via discursive battles operating across scales over the meaning of environment and sustainability. The ‘politics from below’ around environmental issues are perhaps especially

varied, as agrarian and environmental movements have distinct – sometimes converging and at other times diverging – agendas.

### **Silences: gender and generation**

Two important dimensions of ‘political responses from below’ – their gendered and generational dynamics – are largely missing from this collection. Although the Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI) explicitly included gender (and, more recently, generational) dynamics in its calls for research proposals and conference papers, the response has been rather modest. This, we feel, reflects the general state of the art. The importance of analyzing the gendered dimensions of large-scale land deals was rightly flagged some years ago (Behrman, Meinzen-Dick, and Quisumbing 2012), and a few articles and chapters on this have appeared in recent years (e.g., Doss, Summerfield, and Tsikata 2014; Julia and White 2012; Tsikata and Yaro 2014; White, Park, and Julia 2014). However, work in this area has been slow to emerge, and also the balance of its focus has been on gendered impacts and vulnerabilities resulting from land deals rather than gendered agency, responses and resistance (but see Edelman and León 2013).

Gender relations also structure both the varied experiences of land deals and responses to them, as shown in the case of oil palm in Indonesia (Morgan 2013). Loss of common property resources may dispossess women of resource rights on which they depend, while simultaneously incorporating men in commodity relations (Tsikata and Yaro 2014). Incorporation is virtually always a gendered process, shaped by historical and existing gender relations and divisions of labour, and in turn entrenching or ameliorating gendered inequalities. Reactions too are gendered, with women and men responding, both individually and collectively, in diverse ways to the promises and threats of land deals. In the case of a sugar plantation in Amuru District in northern Uganda, described by Martiniello (2015), women were at the forefront of community opposition. To prevent state surveyors and company representatives from demarcating land for the plantation, women protestors stripped naked, in a confrontational act of resistance that mobilized the cultural symbolism of women’s bodies and reproductive roles, and which proved effective – along with several legal challenges – in stalling the land deals for several years.

Researchers have given even less attention to generational differences and tensions in local people’s engagement with corporate land deals and agribusiness. This neglect is surprising. Intergenerational relationships and tensions have been a recurring theme in studies of agrarian change, especially in Africa, but they consistently receive less notice than class and gender relations (Sumberg et al. 2012). A youth and generational perspective adds another powerful reason to De Schutter’s arguments that large-scale land deals (whether for purchase or long lease) should be seen as the ‘last and least desirable option’ (De Schutter 2011) because they close off the smallholder option, not only for today’s farmers but also for members of the next generation, who face permanent alienation from land on which they, or their children, might want to farm, and in the absence of livelihood opportunities elsewhere (White 2012).

While smallholder dispossession for plantation agriculture or contract farming schemes may make some provision for existing smallholders in terms of (reduced) land allocation, generally there is no provision for the next generation. Following the Scottish Highland Clearances of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, dispossession often left the older generation of crofters and cottars ‘hanging on’, despite the onslaught on their land and livelihoods, but still reluctant to leave. The next generation, however, was less

willing to acquiesce to these straitened circumstances, often made trouble, and was encouraged and sometimes forced to migrate to the south, or to North America. No land at all was made available for young couples wanting to marry (Napier Commission 1884). Young people may have different interests in land deals (pro or con), and different ways of promoting their interests and engaging with state and corporate power. We hope to see work on these generational issues in the next few years.

## Conclusion

This collection draws attention to a spectrum of reactions to land deals which extend far beyond resistance *per se*, and collectively constitute the ‘politics from below’ of the global land grab. What explains successful resistance, and what does resistance produce? Some of the papers show how cross-class, identity-based and even transnational alliances mounted effective resistance to land deals, while others focus on engagement with the state and private capital rather than direct confrontation. Reactions are shaped by and in turn shape social differentiation, shifting the contours of and possibilities for political alliances. Less clear are the alternatives that emerge, and that are proposed. While some of the papers depict rural communities mounting powerful counter-narratives to land enclosures, commodification and commercialization, and seeking land sovereignty and autonomy from the state and markets, others point to demands from below for incorporation, or changed terms of incorporation, in land deals and the tenure arrangements, production systems and value chains that they produce.

We emphasize how the framing of research on land deals is enriched by explicit connection to the scholarship on the peasantry and to critical agrarian studies. Conceptual and analytical frames from the agrarian literature are helpful in illuminating the range of reactions to land deals. Key concepts include repertoires of contention, exclusion versus incorporation, disciplining, defensive versus propositional practices, Polanyian counter-movements and governance fixes, among others. Methods and disciplinary approaches from various traditions and schools of thought – ranging from political ecology to geography, rural sociology and anthropology – shape the questions we ask about the politics of land deals, the methods we use and the understandings we derive. The papers we present here also highlight differences in terms of spatial dimensions and the scale at which land deals and reactions to them are analyzed – from transnational, to national, regional, local, community, kinship, household and individual levels, with the latter requiring further disaggregation to account for gender and generational differences.

What does this current state of research on the ‘politics from below’ in response to land grabbing imply for future research agendas? This collection suggests that the ‘politics from below’ is not just the reactions of local communities to the expansion of corporate and state control over community land and territory in the global South. Importantly, ‘politics from below’ is also constitutive of trajectories of agrarian change. To deepen our understanding and to sharpen analysis in critical agrarian studies, we need signposts for future research. First is the urgent need to address the near-total absence of critical analysis of gendered differences. While there is a growing literature on gendered impacts of land deals, there is little empirical work and even less analytical and theoretical treatment of gendered responses to land deals. Second is the continued silence on the intergenerational dynamics of land deals and the responses to them, including inter-generational conflict, and implications for future generations and the possibilities for agrarian livelihoods.

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