

# Africa for Sale?

Positioning the State, Land and Society in  
Foreign Large-Scale Land Acquisitions in Africa

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INTRODUCTION: CONTESTED LANDSCAPES—ANALYSING THE ROLE  
OF THE STATE, LAND REFORMS AND PRIVATIZATION IN FOREIGN  
LAND DEALS IN AFRICA<sup>1</sup>

Sandra J.T.M. Evers, Caroline Seagle and Froukje Krijtenburg

The past several decades have witnessed an unprecedented intensification of foreign investments in, and acquisitions of, large swathes of arable land in the global South. Often referred to as 'land grabbing' or 'foreign land acquisitions' (FLAs, herein),<sup>2</sup> millions of hectares are increasingly claimed by and leased out to transnational or domestic entities, governments, multinational private companies, and international organisations (Cotula et al. 2009; Vidal 2010; Smaller and Mann 2009; IIED 2009; Rice 2010). Stemming from broader historical, economic and social trends (Zoomers 2010), FLAs nevertheless reflect a new frontier of land control (Anseeuw et al. 2012, 2; Peluso and Lund 2011). Many financially rich, resource poor countries are now turning to resource rich, financially poor countries to ensure security in food, minerals and energy (Borras and Franco 2012). This is not entirely new; the colonial and pre-colonial period witnessed vast 'grabbing' of territory by outside actors, thus signaling that FLAs may be historically embedded. As part of broader trends in de-territorialization, globalization and market capitalism, the rapid rush to control land stems from multiple converging forces; World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund) policies attempting to reverse the impacts of over a decade of SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programmes) through the encouragement of economic liberalization, land privatisation and export-oriented economies have created circumstances favourable to mega-land acquisitions. Within

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<sup>1</sup> This volume is the outcome of an international conference held in November 2010 entitled, *'Africa for Sale? Analysing and Theorizing Foreign Land Claims and Acquisitions'* at the University of Groningen. The conference was hosted by the Netherlands Association of African Studies (NVAS). We like to thank the authors of this volume for their feedback on the editorial introduction.

<sup>2</sup> In activist circles but also in academic literature, foreign large-scale land acquisitions are commonly referred to as 'land grabs' as they are often assumed to be illegal and corrupt—colonial hegemony with a new [neoliberal] face. However, this view overlooks the reality that many deals occur through perfectly legal policy structures embedded in positive law. Marx, who first coined the term 'land grabbing' (White et al. 2012: 621) was additionally referring to 'perfectly legal' processes, such as the English and Scottish 'enclosures' and highland clearances.

this context, the rise and embrace of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as a means of boosting economic growth has accompanied new regulatory frameworks surrounding land access and reform, and an overall loosening of state policies surrounding private foreign investments (Borras et al. 2011). It is estimated that over 46 million hectares of territory were leased out to or the subject of potential land deals with foreign investors since 2006 (World Bank 2010). Other figures differ, with IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute) suggesting that 20 million hectares had been officially transferred to investors by 2009 worldwide (in von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009). It is clear, however, that most deals—up to 70%—are occurring in Africa (World Bank 2010), and in total the FAO estimates that 20 million hectares of land have been leased out to private companies, states and businesses in Africa alone (Hallam 2009).

But why the rapid rush for land? While foreign acquisitions of land are nothing new and can be traced back to the colonial period, where control of vast swathes of territory was directly linked to mass production schemes and exports initiated by colonial powers, the past few decades suggest an intensification of foreign direct investment (FDI) in land (Görge et al. 2009), driven by what Hall (201b) refers to as the global ‘triple-F’ dilemma of ‘food, fuel and finance’. The 2007/08 financial meltdown, combined with the FAO’s 2008 declaration that world food production would have to double by 2050 in order to meet global demand, sparked a worldwide crisis of food security. During this period, the price of food, particularly staple crops such as wheat, rice and maize, skyrocketed, leading foreign investors to speculate that agricultural markets were prime arenas for increased profit-making (Steinberg 2008).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, speculation over the increasing value of arable land is a major driver of FLAs, involving not only private investors but also banks, governments and sovereign wealth funds (Cuffaro and Hallam 2011).<sup>4</sup> Rising food prices, driven by vast investor interests (primarily European private banking and investment firms) in the future of commodity markets, combined with concern of the scarcity of food supplies, led to what the FOE describes as a process of ‘excessive speculation’ in agricultural markets, fuelling foreign investments in territory that was increasing in value despite nothing happening on the ground (FOE 2012: 13). Many have noted discourses of food scarcity

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<sup>3</sup> Much of this price increase related to the growth of biofuels (rather than food) markets.

<sup>4</sup> See Halliday, F. ‘Sovereign Wealth Funds: Power vs. Principle’ Transnational Institute (10 March 2008). Available from: <http://www.tni.org/archives/act/18035>, Accessed 31.07.12.

confound the reality that “world food supplies are sufficient to feed the world’s population one and a half times over” and obscure a more structural problem of distribution (Weis 2007 in Kay 2012, 6).

Moreover, land is being acquired for various reasons, not just food production. Agricultural markets today include both food and non-food agricultural products, such as sugarcane, palm oil and jatropha plantations: crops eventually processed into biofuels (Borras, McMichael and Scoones 2010). Territorial enclosures for tourism have also led to new enclosures and consolidations of land, as in the case of private game reserves (PGRs) in South Africa (discussed in Andrew et al., this volume). Furthermore, nature conservation initiatives, including REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of Forests), have accelerated land enclosures (Vidal 2008; Corson 2011; De Schutter 2010a), a process which Fairhead, Leach and Scoones (2012) recently coined ‘green grabbing’. In turn, large-scale mineral exploitation has intensified in recent years due to the restructuring of mining laws intended to attract foreign investors. Such laws often reflect a shift from nationalization to privatization of the mining industry, and frequently involve joint venture agreements made between foreign companies and host governments (see de Koning, this volume). Linkages between these various land deals are not always evident, though recent scholarship has examined the interdependencies and similarities between multiple types of acquisitions (Borras et al. 2011; Hall 2011a), such as the emerging ‘green economy’ of large-scale mining, nature conservation and biodiversity offsetting (see Seagle 2012). This suggests that FLAs do not occur discretely but rather as a convergence of trends embedded in broader market liberalization and valuation schemes, globalization and increasing private sector engagement in development (see chapter by Zoomers, this volume).

But while land deals in their current manifestation clearly stem from a neoliberal logic that prioritizes the growth and expansion of free markets, exports and capitalist accumulation, McMichael has observed that FLAs signal a more complex and contradictory process of accumulation embedded in late capitalism: he writes that land deals constitute a

... reflex of changing conditions of accumulation: first, as capital’s costs of production: (energy) and reproduction (wage-foods) rise in tandem; and second, as finance capital capitalizes offshore agro-food zones as (speculative) substitutes for ecologically exhausted Northern crop lands and as energy crop sites. As such, the land grab provides a lens on the contradictory dynamics of the food regime, which, at one and the same time, situates the land grab as something other than simply a contemporary enclosure of land for capitalist expansion (McMichael 2012, 681–682).

As many FLAs often operate through [renewable] leases (in rare cases full ownership) assigned by the government, what we are seeing is the rapid control—rather than outright ‘grab’—of territory by foreign investors (Peluso and Lund 2011). Indeed, this reflects not only rapidly shifting property relations and processes of accumulation, but also an uneven and contradictory food regime (McMichael 2012).

While some projects never come to fruition, others involve not only the transfer of technology, financial capital and employment potential, but also cultural values, very specific ideas about land use and development, and certain labour arrangements. Some states aim to expand national boundaries to create ‘enclaves’ of development and investment flows in host countries; such has been the case, for instance, with some Chinese investments in Africa and elsewhere (see Nyiri 2009) and the phenomenon of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Speculative or not, discourses of foreign land control have raised concern among citizens in many host countries. Contrary to widespread accounts, the collapse of the Malagasy government in 2009, spurred by the Daewoo Logistics land deal which would have devoted approximately 1 300 000 hectares to palm oil and maize (Teyssier et al. 2009/2010), was due primarily not to peasant protests but to dissent from civil society organizations and concentrated in Antananarivo, the capital city (Randrianja 2012). Nevertheless, the mediation of the conflict was a symbolic representation of the central government’s control over land and natural resources, and assisted Andry Rajoelina in articulating his rationale for ousting incumbent President Marc Ravalomanana (Burnod 2010). It remains uncertain what stage the deal actually was in. (Randrianja 2012). This example suggests that a gap exists in broader discourses of ‘land grabs’ and actual realities; moreover, the sentiments of the ‘local population’ are hardly homogeneous and often absent from the debates.

#### ANALYSING THE ROLE OF THE STATE: LAND REFORMS AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF RURAL LANDSCAPES

However, within this vast collection of literature, the role of the state and intermediate actors in triggering, mediating, negotiating, or regulating foreign land deals, while crucial to consider, has surfaced less prominently in the debates (for a recent contribution, see Wolford et al. 2013). Indeed, it is generally agreed that ‘[a]ny attempt to understand the current dynam-



ics of enclosures would be incomplete without addressing the critical role of the state' (Makki and Geisler 2011, 3). With the impetus of the World Bank, African governments assist foreign investors in engaging in a policy process of titling and commodifying land. Land reforms instigated by the state in compliance with imperatives of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policies embraced by the World Bank have created an atmosphere favourable to large-scale land acquisitions. The intensification of reforms has spread, in many cases, across all natural resource sectors—land access and ownership, minerals, water, forests, and various commodities (see Smillie and Létourneau 2009). Some land redistributions take place prior to the large-scale lease of territory, while other reforms occur during or just after the swap of land. Contracts with investors are often negotiated with the central host state, and governments play an important role in paving way for foreign investments.

This volume captures the entire range of state involvement with FLAs and illustrates how these deals reach into every level of interaction that states have, from their relations with other states at one extreme to their relations with local village populations at the other. We focus on how the state, in both historical and contemporary contexts, acts as a crucial actor in creating the fertile ground for foreign investments. Authors in this volume analyze the actors, power structures and regulatory frameworks involved in land deals, and ultimately the consequences for local people—who often face resettlement, livelihood shifts and potential conflicts but who might also find spaces in which to resist foreign control or perhaps benefit from opportunities created. The chapters in this volume make clear that the 'grabbing' of territory has roots in shifting land policy and deeply engrained social, political and economic dynamics and inequalities. In terms of setting the stage (naturally stimulated by international dynamics and institutions), the state plays an important role in negotiating land reforms often geared towards land registration and privatization; these policy shifts often accompany or precede foreign investments in land and facilitate the implementation of large-scale projects. Several chapters, for example, demonstrate the costs and benefits of land reform policies as they affect agricultural land in Botswana (see Sapi-noli and Hitchcock, this volume) irrigated land in Mali (Adamczewski et al., this volume) and areas designated as wildlife tourism and hunting sites (see Andrew et al., this volume and Snijders 2012). Contrary to the widespread assumption that foreign actors 'grab' land illegally from weak governments, states often invite outside investments and work in partnership with foreign actors to negotiate the contracts, regulatory

measures and implementation phase.<sup>5</sup> FLAs bring up important issues of food sovereignty and the reorganization of rural economics, but also spark issues of state sovereignty, the role of domestic investors in driving enclosures, and state-state bilateral relations (see Strauss, this volume). Authors in this volume present various reflections on and case studies of land deals that specifically accompany state-led land policy shifts, and in doing so, demonstrate how state authority, wealth and control is (re)distributed or (re)concentrated in the event of an acquisition.

Within this context, we are interested in the following questions: While the weakening of the nation-state was a key symptom of neoliberalism, do FLAs signal the resurgence of a new 'neoliberal state' wherein governments play a central role in facilitating enclosures (see Peck and Tickell 2002 and Büscher 2010)? Are we witnessing a new form of state-making and the production of national identity, or an imposition of global forces on domestic modes of production—indeed the 'foreignization of space' (Zoomers 2010)? In other words, do FLAs in fact mask the expansion of state power, as development was once slated to do (see Ferguson 1994), or are we seeing new 'governance states' wherein international actors supersede the state to control social, environmental and political decision-making (Duffy 2006)? While the state plays a crucial role in facilitating, promoting or blocking some mega-land deals, the activities of the state are poorly understood and remain lacking from broader land debates.

The authors in this volume present rich empirical evidence and theoretical reflections on the land grab debate in Africa, revealing varied and complex relations between local communities, foreign entities and various 'faces of the state' (Navaro-Yashin 2011). These state bodies might include local and domestic investors, regional authorities, or civil society groups involved in shifting regulatory frameworks. Authors zoom in on both the global structures and rural transformations taking place as well as the socio-cultural repercussions of land dispossession and resettlement. Many cases show that, contrary to popular media, smallholders and local populations can sometimes resist outside control or even benefit from land deals, often with the help of decentralized state structures. While the state plays an important role as facilitator of large-scale agricultural

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<sup>5</sup> A recent special issue of *Development and Change* (March 2013), edited by Wendy Wolford, Saturnino M. Borrás Jr., Ruth Hall, Ian Scoones, and Ben White, provides an important glimpse of the state's role in the global 'land grab' (see Wolford et al. 2013).

investments, both domestic and foreign, it is often a key actor involved in managing local conflicts and social relations. This has not only changed productive relations and land/labour arrangements, but also restructured rural landscapes, lifestyles and social cultural value systems.

The state can be viewed as a broker both prior to and during a land deal in terms of facilitating and implementing land privatization and titling reforms. Land reforms often follow a number of trajectories and are driven by various forces (for detailed typologies, see Borrás and Franco [2012], discussed below, and Hall [2011a]). These often result in the redistribution of communal or 'public' land back to the state for lease or sale, and sometimes involve titling or registering land to smallholder groups or individuals (including foreign companies) with claims to land. The central problematic in this regard, however, is the incompatibility between customary land tenure arrangements and those of national law, not to mention the diversity and complexity of land use and access regimes in the countryside. Historically, we are reminded of James Scott's concept of 'legibility' which he used to capture dynamics of land policy change stemming from foreign austerity measures in the 1970s. Legibility refers to a practice wherein states attempt to take "exceptionally complex, illegible, and local social practices, such as land tenure customs or naming customs" and generate a 'standard grid' whereby they could be "centrally recorded and monitored" (Scott 1998, 2). Legibility is thus a process of visibility, of enacting state authority over territory; tensions emerge between customary tenure and legal tenure, privatization and communal rights, cultural value and market valorization.

In this volume, various chapters show how FLAs are embedded in a process of state legibility and control, wherein governments and domestic actors take a leading role in negotiating and facilitating land reforms. But we also see that a historical focus is crucial to consider, as current processes of dispossession and land control are often embedded in deeply rooted in-country inequalities and North-South political economic relations (see chapters by Postel and Andrew, Brandt. et al.). At the crux of this process lie various contestations over land, labour and production, but also synergies and opportunities created for various actors affected by land deals. These dynamics are worthy of exploration, as the consequences of land reforms in terms of rural land access and ownership are often intense and incredibly varied. Grounding themselves on rich empirical material, the authors of this volume address these dynamics and critically examine the impacts of large-scale land projects in Africa.

State engagements in FLAs can be roughly analytically divided into six stages: 1) Creation of a legally favourable environment (land titling and land reforms) to facilitate foreign investments in and access to land; 2) Designation of land, in some cases, as Special Economic Zones suited for foreign investments; 3) Negotiation of contracts with foreign stakeholders interested in such investments; 4) Implementation phase of the contract in the local setting; 5) Mediation and legitimization of the project in the local setting; 6) Dispute regulation in cases when conflicts in the project zone arise.

As the chapters in this volume highlight, the nature of the state intervention is quite different in the various phases of such projects. In phases one and two, the state aims at realising two things at the same time; on the one hand, it restructures its economy at the impetus of the World Bank and debt repayment schemes in order to facilitate land titling and levy taxes, and on the other, it opens up land for foreign investment under the banner of economic development. Despite the strings of the World Bank, host governments are often in a position to adapt their own regulatory and legislative structures to foreign interests; in principle they also determine the investment zones (it should be noted however that some investors bypass the central state and seek their entry directly at the decentralised state level) and negotiate the contracts (which often but not always include social and environmental assessments) in stage three. Once the contract is concluded, the implementation phase usually means a withdrawal of the central state. The de-central state officials at, for example, the district or municipality level mediate the arrival of the project in the local setting through their collaboration with project personnel; these individuals also mediate the message to local villagers that this is a state approved project in which compliance of local populations is required.

Often local authorities (for example at the level of the municipality) take on the role of brokers. They either facilitate the implementation of FLAs or act as mediators when conflicts arise; in some cases, local authorities can help defend local land rights and re-allocate land access despite foreign control of contested territory. De Koning (this volume) describes how struggles over access to mineral wealth in the DRC between artisanal miners and industrial companies resulted in conflict resolution through the state's decentralized structures, to the benefit of the artisanal miners. This case reveals that local level dynamics and social structures can assist vulnerable populations in securing their land rights. This often occurs where the involvement of local authorities in local or regional economies and related land-based social relationships can succeed in creating a

buffer from negative impacts. In other cases, however, as the chapter by Sapignoli and Hitchcock demonstrates, state attempts to divide land into specific categories have resulted in lost access to land and, in many cases, dispossession among the San of Botswana. They show how a land policy that bypassed the land boards and led to the cessation of hunting activities, continues to have significant impacts in the country, particularly on the poor; this example underlines the major impact states have on defining rural landscapes and livelihoods. In South Africa, as shown by Andrew et al. (this volume), state-led restitution and land reform programmes designed to improve the black rural population's access to and control of land did not have the desired outcome and failed to benefit the vast majority of those targeted; conversely, liberalisation and land policies reinforced private ownership, creating opportunities for investors, including foreigners, reflecting broader changes occurring within commercial agriculture (see Andrew et al. this volume). In such cases, local authorities often fail to monitor (or are not charged with monitoring) whether an investor is abiding by local rules and sensitivities. Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is in this regard often a scant process in which villagers can hardly assess what is going to happen on their land, let alone understand the consequences of the project. Scholars of land deals have repeatedly pointed out that meaningful consultation with local populations and appropriate social and environmental impact assessments are almost never effected (Cotula 2011).

It is often only in cases where problems do arise (usually because of contradictory views of what land is and who may access it) and villagers seek remedy to their felt harms, that the central state (or its legal systems) comes back into the limelight. One could call this the 'boomerang principle' in which, after the completion of the contract, the project is launched in the local setting and the central state withdraws, but once a process of conflict and dispute resolution has to be engaged in, the state is forced to position itself again, both legally and in terms of their dealings with the citizens in the project area.

In this book, the various stages of the insertion of foreign investors in local settings are discussed. Andrew et al., Sapignoli and Hitchcock, and Adamcewski et al. discuss the role of the state in the first phase when land reforms paved the way for increased foreign investments in territory. State-state bilateral relations in turn play a key role in shaping policies which open up land for foreign investments. In this regard, it is crucial to consider how foreign entities engage with host governments, how states engage with each other (see Strauss, this volume), and how policies

advocating increased privatization and FDI lead to rural transformations (see Postel, this volume). Consequences of such deals for local land-users range from resettlement, land use change or dispossession to new forms of (sometimes adverse) incorporation or exclusion from land based activities (Hall 2011a).

What is clear is that FLAs are imparting vast and complex changes to rural agrarian systems (Lavers 2012). Moreover, states play more varied and important roles in land deals than previously thought. Nevertheless it is crucial to stress that the analytical distinction between foreign, national and local is sometimes difficult to make as these might converge in the same person. But such actors can wear different hats at the same time, like a local chief or mayor who also invests in land while facilitating other investments in a local setting (see World Bank 2010). Foreign investors usually go through national, local business and NGO levels when concluding and eventually implementing the project. Thus, it should be kept in mind that 'foreign' large-scale land acquisitions in reality concern an amalgam of international, national and local stakeholders vying for land and sometimes playing on various sides of the fence, as is the case with smallholders giving up their own plots to perform wage labour for investors, or a mayor mediating the advantages of a project to local groups. Nevertheless, in terms of compensation and ultimate benefits to local populations, the (re)concentration of land resulting from land titling, unequal joint venture agreements or land leases can in many cases lead to elite or corporate capture of benefits at the local level (Hall 2011a; McMichael 2012).

Chapters analyse the role of the state in redefining rural landscapes and livelihoods in several African countries (Botswana, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Mali). Relating case studies of various land acquisition classifications ranging from foreign food production, mining, conservation and tourism, and sugar-cane production, each chapter contributes to wider debates centred on how FLAs produce new in-country and state-state dynamics, and how land reforms instigated by the state have led to a transformation in rural landscapes. In doing so, authors examine how labour arrangements, property relations and local relationships to land have changed as a result of FLAs. How do state policies concerning land reforms impede or allow the foreign acquisition of arable land? What are the effects of these land laws on people struggling against dispossession? What land tenure or titling arrangements characterize these deals, and how are rural communities affected by such policies?

What new land-labour relations emerge as a result of land enclosures and territorialisation processes, and with what effect on rural agrarian systems of production? Finally, how does the state manage potential conflicts, resettlement procedures and resulting rural social differentiations?

To summarize, authors in this volume point in their contributions to the fact that FLAs are not an entirely new phenomenon that suddenly arose over the past twenty to thirty years. South Africa especially has a long history of FLAs on a large scale, resulting in many changes in titling and tenure arrangements, and in the long run irreversibly undermining first the formal and later the socio-economic position of local communities. The role of the state is crucial in analysing the historical roots of the current land rush in terms of policies aimed at economic liberalization, privatization and land reforms, which indeed facilitated the entry of private investors. Accordingly, in this volume we bring the question of the state back into FLA debates. The following sections will relate our theoretical frame for understanding the implications of FLAs before reflecting more on the role of the state and presenting a chapter overview.

#### THEORIZING LANDSCAPE: LAND AS MATERIAL AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

In this volume, the focus on the state, land reforms, state policies and their complex impacts on local populations is discussed through the analytical angle of 'contested landscapes'; in this we suggest that spatial concepts related to 'place' and 'space' (ontological assessments of geographical place) can help analytically unpack social scientific research on land use, cover and access shifts arising from foreign large-scale land acquisitions. Where place refers to the physical realities of a particular location, space is less stable and rather composed of 'intersections of mobile elements' (Certeau 1984, 117 in Pannell 2006, 163; Svašek 2002, 498). 'Space' is often denoted in relation to *how* people live in and imbue meaning to a particular location or 'place'. It is indeed how people 'navigate' (Vigh 2009) within a given locality, and is thus highly diverse. Particularly in rural parts of Africa, human lives are shaped by location—whether individuals are engaged in smallholder rice production (Adamczewski et al.), artisanal mining (de Koning), wage labour on private game farms (Andrew et al.), or pastoralism (Sapignoli and Hitchcock), to name a few activities.

In many rural areas, where there is a high dependence on land, local needs for natural resources are not purely economic or utilitarian; human-environment interactions are also deeply embedded in cultural practices



and social relationships that are not always appropriately considered in valuation schemes emerging from FLAs (Makunike 2009, 87). In this sense, land deals bring up issues not only of food and state sovereignty but also cultural sovereignty (Deng 2011). While many local groups have daily livelihood activities tied to land, historical connections to landscape, such as the presence of places of first settlement, ancestral tombs and accompanying customs, draw parallels between land and local [material and intangible] heritage (Krijtenburg this volume; Evers and Seagle 2012; see also Cormier-Salem and Bassett 2007). There is a constant dialogue between the concepts of place and space; when a place is changed or compromised in some way—for example, through an environmental change or land access shift—new spaces are created by people as a means of re-situating themselves within the changed landscape (see Postel, this volume). In this regard, place is imbued with meaning, interpretation and significance; space represents the ideological and ontological shifts that may occur when the physical location changes.

Together one can think of the place/space conglomerate as constitutive of 'landscape,' which Pannell (2006, 163) describes analogically as both 'map' (place, the physical locality and its features at a given time) and 'itinerary' (space, a chosen route through the place). Tim Ingold also highlights this point in his book, *Lines* (2007) where he discusses how people trace their lines of movement through historical and temporal landscapes. However, landscapes are approached and used differently by different actors. In a rural area, for instance, we might find women, children and men using the landscape differently; similarly, we might find domestic or foreign actors creating new landscapes of extraction, nature tourism or agricultural production—all of which are discussed in this volume. Each landscape is dynamic and perceived, used and navigated differently. Landscapes and representations of landscape can thus tell a great deal about the social, cultural, gendered, economic, and political structures of a given locality.

Drawing upon Samuels (1979), who observed that landscapes are formed in constant dialogue with social, cultural and economic factors and expressions, Roymans et al. (2009, 339) developed the concept of 'landscape biography' in order to consider how landscapes are shaped as an outcome of a long-term ('*longue durée*') and "complex interplay between the history of mentalities and values, institutional and governmental changes, social and economic developments and ecological dynamics". Landscapes are always transformed over time: re-shaped, re-used and re-molded according to changing conditions (Ibid). As landscapes (or features of a landscape)



change, the social space changes as well. In turn, memories are embedded within the lived experience of a particular landscape and responsible in some degree for identity construction (Roymans et al. 2009). Many people might have a national, ethnic or personal attachment to place, but attachments to 'space' are more fluid and mobile. This is in part due to the fact that while a physical location (place) may be immovable, changes to the material features of a place may result in shifting perceptions of space; in this sense, foreign large-scale land acquisitions often lead to constantly shifting landscapes as a result of the power relations flowing between the various stakeholders in the local setting.

As described above, chapters show how current developments in foreign large-scale land acquisitions are legally and historically embedded in policies concerning the restructuring of rural landscapes; in this sense, we can see physical relationships with the environment—such as land-labour relations, access to natural resources and conceptions of cultural heritage—changing as a result of land enclosures. Herein we find not only contestations over economic opportunities created by land deals, but also socio-temporal valuations of 'landscape' and differences in land use strategies, livelihood priorities and cultural imperatives. How are human relationships with landscapes compromised in the event of a large-scale land transfer? And how have movement patterns, or 'landscape biographies' (see Roymans et al. 2006) been adjusted due to restrictions of land access? Chapters zoom in on how land reforms, titling policies, privatization, and the arrival of outside stakeholders in local settings have changed ideas concerning the value of land, land use and social-cultural relations (see chapters by Postel, Tegomoh, Andrew et al., and Buchalik in this volume).

The following sections give insight into recent debates on FLAs before analyzing the role of the state, land reforms and privatization in shaping foreign land deals and accompanying agrarian changes.

#### ACCESSING LAND IN AFRICA: 'EMPTY', 'IDLE' OR 'UNDER-USED'?

Africa is often portrayed as the 'lost continent': steeped in tradition, isolated from markets and trapped in the past—a place where vast swathes of land either lie unoccupied or are poorly utilised (Jarosz 1992). As formal land titling is generally absent from most tenure regimes in Africa, governments commonly hold official rights to territory. In fact, untenured, customary land makes up the largest land category in all of Africa (World

Bank 2003, xxiii). Not surprisingly, therefore, the World Bank (2010) suggests that between 445 and 1.7 billion hectares of 'unused' and 'marginal' land lies dormant, ready for investment. Land deemed by host governments to be 'non-private' or 'public' territory is often set aside for foreign investments and acquisitions (Franco 2009).

Echoing the World Bank discourse, land sought by investors is often described as void of human presence altogether or host to unproductive land uses deemed unworthy by, or invisible to, the state (Lavers 2012, 803). Although argued to the contrary by proponents of the 'empty' land discourse, land acquired by foreign companies is often simultaneously claimed or used by rural communities who have economic, social and existential connections to the territory in which they live. Despite the rapid rise in urbanization over the past twenty years, the number of people living in rural areas is growing and reflects an increasing demand for and reliance on land in the countryside (Borras and Franco 2012). While numerous studies have detailed the lack of [local] benefits arising from FLAs, foreign investments in land are promoted as necessary to stimulate economic growth and rural sustainable development in host countries, provided land deals are appropriately 'disciplined' by regulatory mechanisms, referred to by the World Bank (2010) as 'good governance' (Mann 2010). Voluntary guidelines focused on compensation, mitigation and social-environmental regulations are indeed believed by some to transform mega-land deals into development opportunities for poor countries, imparting new technologies, improved agricultural productivity, poverty alleviation, and modernisation (IIED 2009; World Bank 2010; Deininger 2011). Accordingly, land deals are expected to improve rather than hinder rural sustainable development (see Cotula et al. 2009). The 8th Millennium Development Goal on 'global partnerships for development' is a case in point, as it aims commonly to involve foreign investors in poverty alleviation and environmental protection (De Schutter 2009, 13; Cotula et al. 2009, 9; Hamann 2010). In turn, there is a growing assumption that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) can improve sustainable development in the global South, provided the strength of the host country's ability to absorb positive inflows is high (Lall and Narula 2004).

Conversely, many scholars suggest that projected benefits of such deals are ambiguous at best, and underline the often disastrous repercussions for local land users who face displacement, land dispossession, livelihood loss, environmental degradation, and lost access to land and natural resources upon which they depend (Borras et al. 2011; White et al. 2012;

Hall 2011a; de Schutter 2010b, 2011; Li 2011; GRAIN 2008).<sup>6</sup> In turn, deals are described as lacking in ‘free prior informed consent’, and thus “violate or disrespect customary land rights” and “fail to deliver on employment and development” (FOE 2012, 7). The long-anticipated and seminal World Bank report (2010), *The Global Land Rush: Can it yield sustainable and equitable benefits?* concedes that “investors failed to follow through on their investments plans, in some cases after inflicting serious damage on the ‘local resource base’” and that much vaunted sustainable development projects were “rarely if ever” realized in host countries (see Blas 2010). It should be noted, however, that the World Bank’s confession belies the institution’s own assertion that foreign land deals should be promoted despite the risks involved, provided that voluntary codes of conduct are appropriately adhered to. In addition to numerous empirical studies emerging on the local consequences of large-scale land acquisitions (see LDPI working paper series [2010–2013] and major research initiatives underway at PLAAS, Utrecht University, the University of Amsterdam and the VU University Amsterdam), case studies carried out by FOE (2010, 27) suggest that “while foreign companies pay lip service to the need for ‘sustainable development’ ... demand for land is resulting in the loss of pasture and forests ... causing an increase in greenhouse gas emissions”.

Against this backdrop, international observers are demanding that local livelihoods, interests and needs be prioritized (Mann 2010, 8; de Schutter 2011). A growing body of activist networks analysing the politics of global land acquisitions have voiced concern over whether foreign land deals can meaningfully address issues of poverty, rural food security and environmental degradation (see GRAIN, the International Land Coalition, and La Via Campesina). Some scholars have promoted a human rights-based approach to protecting local land rights compromised by FLAs (de Schutter 2010a). Much scholarship has focused on how rural landscapes and livelihoods, as well as the agrarian economy more generally, are being rapidly transformed by advensts in foreign large-scale land (Bernstein 2010). Hall’s (2011a) typology of rural social differentiation, incorporation and exclusion processes has been most recently complemented by Borras and Franco (2012)’s land transfer mechanism model, which describes how

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed case studies, see the proceedings from the 2011 ‘Global Land Grabbing’ conference held in Brighton. Available at <http://www.future-agricultures.org/papers-and-presentations>, Accessed 03.08.12.

land is swapped between states and foreign entities (discussed below). Li (2011) has examined how land-labour arrangements shift following project implementation, noting that in the event capitalism requires both land and labour, poor peasants facing dispossession are sometimes contracted to work on the new concessions. However, in other cases, Li notes that where the land is needed—but local populations are not—evictions and loss of livelihood may occur (see also de Schutter 2011).

It is important to consider that while not all land deals lead to dispossession, many land users encounter everyday “struggles against dispossession” (Borras and Franco 2012, 53), meaning that shifting regimes of land access as well as new labour and property relations can create everyday hardships that may heighten the risk of rural poverty—even when populations are not relocated or dispossessed outright. This was, for example, the case for farm dwellers in South Africa, when in the 20th century tenant arrangements were gradually abolished by the state (see Postel, this volume), or when in the 21st century white farm owners converting to game farming sometimes use gradual yet coercive tactics to push black farm dwellers off the property (see Andrews et al., this volume). These studies show that land acquisitions do not follow a unilinear or predictable path, and that each acquisition has its own complexity, involving various different social, political, environmental, historical, and economic contexts. Similarly, many authors agree that rural transformations taking place before, after and during land acquisitions are incredibly varied. This echoes Scott (1998)’s call that state governance pay closer attention (and adapt) to contingencies and shifting local realities.

These studies help us to begin to understand and categorize which types of deals are occurring where and with what repercussions and/or opportunities for local communities. Again, the lack of transparency surrounding such deals has impeded a better understanding of precise local repercussions and global stakeholder relations. By focusing on rural agrarian change, chapters re-position the most vulnerable groups at the centre of the land acquisition debate. Amidst the wealth of empirical studies now existing on the land grab debate, in this volume we focus on the need to situate land deals within a specific historical (land policy) context, which is done in nearly all the chapters. Some authors go further to show that not all deals lead to negative impacts among rural populations, and it is important to consider possible benefits that investments in agriculture can have or are claimed to have. Still other chapters accurately show how land privatization and consolidation put pressures on land-based livelihood practices, in many cases preventing smallholders from sustaining

themselves and future generations. The following section will go into a deeper analysis of the role of the state in development and FLAs.

#### STATE-MAKING AND THE ROLE OF 'DEVELOPMENT' IN FOREIGN LAND INVESTMENTS

Modern states have long relied upon the 'development' apparatus as crucial to the making of the nation-state. Development was an arena in which 'everyday forms of state formation' were thought to occur (Joseph and Nugget 1994), allowing the state to penetrate lower forms of governance through initiatives designed to 'improve' the well-being of populations—such as education, public administration and new land redistribution laws (Li 1999, 296). As a discourse, 'development' mediates interactions between the state and its citizens, but also creates the semblance that the state indeed exists; it is made visible as a 'provider' of services to populations and thus has a care-taker role. While the state is far from homogeneous, it is often imagined as a collective national entity or homogeneity (Scott 1998; Navaro-Yashin 2011). Ferguson (1994) suggests that development discourse masks the reality of state expansion and diversification; he notes that, through seemingly 'de-politicized' development projects, the state penetrates deeper corners of national boundaries and exerts control over land, people and production. In this sense, while the discourse of development is strongly anti-political, actual development interventions are highly politicized in nature and assist in maintaining state power and hegemony (Ferguson 1994).

The involvement of foreign investors in 'sustainable development' through the large-scale lease or sale of land demands some analysis of how state power is shifting or re-asserting itself in the context of FLAs. Scholars are beginning to link large-scale land deals with 'everyday processes of state formation' (Sikor and Lund 2009) and some contend that "[l]arge-scale land investment should be seen as an extension of the historical processes" aimed at re-asserting the power and identity of the state (Mosley 2012, 1). In Brazil, similar observations have been made; Oliveira (2011) describes how large-scale land investments represent a crucial form of state formation that not only facilitates primarily international investments in territory—through legal policy mechanisms—but also risks increased social-ecological ruptures. He attests to "the importance of internal dynamics of capital within each country and the way in which governments can harness these international pressures towards domestic

efforts at state-making and territorial consolidation” (Oliveira 2011, 3). In the horn of Africa, where distinct historical differences distinguish the region from other parts of the continent, state formation has been linked to the adoption and expansion of foreign land deals (see Lavers 2012; Mosley 2012; Abbink 2011). In Ethiopia, for example, in an attempt to realize development initiatives promoted by organizations such as the World Bank, the state often seeks to make foreign investments beneficial to smallholder agricultural production (Lavers 2012). But the state’s promotion of large-scale (often private) land investments on the one hand and smallholder agricultural production on the other (Sikor 2012, 1082) reveals the contradictory nature of the state’s underlying role and purpose; in some cases, instances of double allocation have occurred, as demonstrated in Adamczewski et al.’s discussion of land deals in Mali (this volume). In terms of the land allocation procedure, FLAs often involve a recentralization of state power and the brokerage of land deals with a few key members of government.

In short, evidence is beginning to show that one cannot analytically separate ‘everyday processes of state formation’ from the growth of FLAs. A key indicator of the state’s renewed role in land governance and development is the turn towards foreign direct investment (FDI) which, heavily promoted by international institutions such as the World Bank, has led to a wealth of policy changes favourable to foreign interests. The historical underpinnings to this shift can be dated to neoliberal restructuring during the 1970s, when state power decreased substantially due to Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). SAPs “weakened the capacity of the States to design and implement appropriate policies to alter the structure of their economies and accelerate progress towards achieving Africa’s social development goals” (CEA 2011, 1). At the same time, liberalization schemes and SAPs signaled the rise of a ‘corporate food regime’ (as opposed to a previous emphasis on domestic food regimes) and growing dependence on private agribusinesses to supply global food chains (McMichael 2012, 682). Accompanying these changes were World Bank and UN calls on host governments in the South to adopt Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Today, FDI functions relatively free from policy restrictions (Lall and Narula 2004, 449) and, in the developing world, is often expected to increase technology transfers, job creation and rural economic growth. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that weak governance and low levels of local human, technological or supplier capabilities will hinder the positive flow of benefits from FDI (if any); interestingly, most states targeted for FLAs (and FDI) are those with ‘weak governance’ (Deininger 2011).

Foreign land transactions have become a key means in which host governments can adopt FDI to attract investments and offset debt accumulation. In return, foreign actors may promise to improve infrastructure or facilities and offer attractive royalties to host states, and in almost all cases, foreign actors acquire and exploit land in partnership or 'joint ventures' with the state. Many investors work through [often private] enterprises or subsidiaries engaged in land development at the local level. Where it involves the private sector, and particularly multinationals, improvements to host countries also depend on whether and how the subsidiary company operating through foreign actors interacts with the State. Thus, the institutional arrangements within each specific country are important to consider in terms of how beneficial a land project might be (Lall and Narula 2004, 450; see also Cuffaro and Hallam 2011). Moreover, Borrás and Franco (2012, 52–53) found that institutional arrangements surrounding land reform actually facilitated the acquisition of land in many country case studies. The following section will explore the role of land reforms in the FLA debate.

#### UNPACKING THE ROLE OF THE STATE: LAND REFORMS

While land deals are almost always carried out in close collaboration with national governments and thus rendered legally valid (Borrás and Franco 2012, 37), they are rarely transparent and very little is known about the actual contractual agreements between states and potential investors (for a recent contribution, see Cotula 2011). This lack of transparency surrounding FLAs has, in fact, been one of the major drivers behind case studies explored in the present volume. Issues of transparency resound through the chapters to varying degrees in the consequences that are described—characteristically qualified by the authors in terms of impeding states and communities and other interested parties and drawing lessons that might help local populations alleviate some of the negative consequences. The World Bank (2010) has noted that governments' inability to provide reliable accounting, records of transactions or implementation processes and transparent financial documentation inhibits the ability of states to effectively manage land deals. In turn, neoliberal reforms and World Bank austerity measures encouraging developing countries to advocate export-oriented economies as a means of reducing debt and securing international aid have led a growing Third World dependence on volatile markets. The growing dependence of the rural poor on international markets has made them more vulnerable to stochastic price shifts (de Schutter interview 2009).



Despite this uneasy playing ground, many host governments actively seek out foreign investments. State-administered land reforms favourable to land privatization often assist governments in transferring ‘public’ or state territory to foreign companies, regardless of customary land entitlements. On a broader level, as a result of such reforms, we can see a shift in agricultural production from smallholder-led production for domestic consumption to private-led production for exports and foreign consumption. One can also see that the state is getting stronger and tightening control over the countryside. This has been seen for example in the case of Rwanda (Huggins 2009).

In turn, within the context of the current land rush, food produced for subsistence or for domestic markets is increasingly being replaced by food produced for energy purposes (biofuels) or foreign markets. De Schutter (2011) has argued that this shift conflicts with what should be the first priority of low-income countries: to feed themselves. The increasing price of food and reliance on imports—combined with the loss of subsistence activities in many cases—arguably makes rural peasants more vulnerable to dispossession (Hall 2011a). In Odoemene’s discussion (this volume) the Nigerian reliance on food imports, due to inadequate government agricultural policies, is cited as the main reason for the state’s attracting white Zimbabwean farmers to start large-scale farming in Nigeria. This point is further substantiated in Adamczewski et al.’s chapter, where smallholder irrigated rice production in Mali is steadily being replaced by large-scale, foreign or national agricultural investments. This shows how smallholder-led agrarian economies are confronted by both state and international interests.

Conversely, upon the realization that there is “no conflict over the long term between inward FDI and domestic capabilities”, many states choose to reduce restrictions on foreign investments in the hope that transfers of technology, skills and finance will improve local development and national economies (Lall and Narula 2004, 448). However, policy restrictions limiting the state’s role in large-scale land projects also means that governments are not positioned to respond to local frictions arising from land deals. Similarly, many new mining laws which aim specifically to open up territory to foreign companies contain clauses which withdraw the role of the state in project implementation. Such laws have accompanied major mining contracts over the past 10–15 years (Sarrasin 2006; see de Koning, this volume).

The state’s role in regulating FLAs at various levels of governance (national, regional and local) is also poorly understood. As mentioned, ‘good governance’ models advocated by the World Bank are intended to promote a voluntary ‘corporate ethic’ and mode of self-regulation,



such that the state requires less intervention in the actual project and can act “more efficiently in society” (O’Laughlin 2008, 945 in Borras and Franco 2012, 35). These include global conventions such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the Principles of Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI principles) which are specifically designed to ‘regulate’ land deals such that ‘win-win’ scenarios are ensured for all stakeholders involved (local communities, host governments, foreign investors, and environmental advocacy groups such as conservation NGOs) (for a discussion see von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009; see also World Bank 2010 and Deininger 2011). Most recently, the FAO released the ‘Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security’ (2012) as a means of outlining ways in which host governments can protect local land rights and food security.<sup>7</sup>

However, the voluntary code of conduct written into many land transfer arrangements contains an underlying tone of ‘tacit complicity’ in sometimes socially and environmentally destructive projects. The codes are non-binding and bolster the World Bank’s contradictory assertion that, despite numerous accounts of negative impacts ranging from outright displacement to lost natural resource access for the rural poor, the risks of large-scale land deals “correspond to equally large opportunities” (World Bank 2010, 142). Many scholars have voiced criticism over the regulatory model, insisting that it does not adequately address the underlying causes of (and potential solutions to) rural poverty (Borras and Franco 2010a; White et al. 2012; Li 2011) and worse, rather than improving rural agricultural production systems, FLAs potentially represent a frontal attack on the rural peasantry itself (Olivier de Schutter 2011). These authors have argued for situating the rural poor at the centre rather than periphery of the FLA debate, and urge global institutions backing foreign investments to avoid viewing local populations as collateral damage that must be better ‘managed’ through voluntary regulations. This would involve re-structuring foreign investments *specifically* such that rural livelihood improvement is treated as a top priority rather than peripheral spin-off. As a result, scholarly and activist networks are calling for alternatives to large-scale investments in agriculture (Kay 2012).

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<sup>7</sup> Full report available at: <http://www.fao.org/nr/tenure/voluntary-guidelines/en/>, Accessed on 31.07.12.

TYPOLOGIES OF LAND TRANSFER:  
LAND USE, TITLING AND OWNERSHIP

Land policies and laws are often formulated in response to changing social, political and economic interactions with—and contestations between—various different actors. These relationships are mediated by class and wealth hierarchies, gender, ethnicity, and power relations. In this sense one cannot draw conclusions on land-based social realities through the formal lens of the state (Scott 1998). Büscher and Dressler (2007), drawing upon the example of community based conservation schemes in South Africa, describe what they call a ‘discursive blur’—a process of obfuscation involved in translating local complexities to higher levels of policy organization in the development world. In this process of translation, much information is either over-simplified, misunderstood or lost. Referring to this fuzzy area of mediation between global, national and local, Igoe and Brockington (2007, 435) note that the concept of the “blur has a value of its own”, wherein “ideas such as participation, sustainability and win-win solutions are used by competing networks of people to mobilize resources as efficiently and quickly as possible”. One can see this in the voluntary guidelines, where discursive representations of ‘win-win’ scenarios may not correspond to local realities. Similarly, Tsing (2002) has urged scholars to look less at ‘things’—such as clear boundary markers, legal papers and titles—as a means of tracking land rights and land transfer arrangements, but instead to analyze how land based social relations are structured within specific contexts (in Borrás and Franco 2010b).

As mentioned above, the enforcement of positive law by the state, as it concerns tenure and related legal structures, is something Scott (1998) has described as a process of state-formation, wherein the state attempts to make complex social phenomena (such as land use and ownership) more ‘legible’. This process of legibility conceals a state strategy to impose more efficient control of and order over populations (Scott 1998; see also Oliveira 2011). As “land-based social relations vary from one historical institutional setting to the next”, so too are they “shaped by specific socio-economic, political, cultural and historical factors” (Borrás and Franco 2012, 50). The embeddedness of these relations in certain landscapes over time suggests that clear ‘things’ (such as land reforms and titling procedures) developed at the national level indeed do not always reflect dynamic land use and access regimes locally—nor do they reflect the embodied value of labour and cultural practices people inscribe in a landscape over time. Here again

we come back to the concepts of place and space, as shown in Buchalik's chapter (this volume) who describes how the interaction between traditional landscaping and a major national road network in Burkina Faso gave rise to new 'symbiotic' forms of local landscaping.

The complexity of agrarian landscapes, as described in sections above, and how they are now rapidly changing as a result of the current land rush, is being slowly unpacked by scholars of FLAs. With regard to how land use regimes are shifting, Borrás and Franco (2012, 51–52) provide an analytical distinction between four different types of land reform accompanying FLAs: Type A ('distributive') refers to a situation wherein land-based wealth and power held by either the state, a private entity or the community is transferred or distributed to the landless poor by government bodies. Type B ('re-distributive') follows this same framework though focuses on redistributing wealth and power. Both Types involve a process of granting either new rights to land (Type A) or protecting pre-existing or former land rights (Type B).

These above land policies can be aptly contrasted with Types C and D, which is what we are now noting in the context of FLAs. Types C and D ('non [re]-distribution' and 're-concentration') refer to land transactions taking place when bureaucratic state structures maintain the *status quo* of land-based inequalities and processes of exclusion. This process of embedded exclusion is what we see with Type C. When a transfer of rights does occur, but land access and control is captured by the elite dominant classes, corporate interests, the state, or village chiefs, the land transaction is referred to as Type D. Drawing upon this typology, Borrás and Franco (2012, 52) suggest that state policies towards land and rural populations have steadily been moving away from Types A and B ('distributive' and 're-distributive') to Types C and D ('non [re]-distribution' and 're-concentration'). Various chapters in this book uphold this typology, where land reforms designed to either uphold or protect local land rights did not have the desired outcome of improving rural food security, but rather created spaces for elite capture, growth of private enterprise and foreign land control. It is thus crucial to analyze how land reforms and policies not only historically underpin but possibly facilitate foreign acquisitions of Africa's arable land.

As mentioned earlier, land titling reforms and privatization often accompany or precede foreign land deals. In this context, ill-defined notions of 'ownership' politicize the negotiation process with local populations and sometimes exacerbate divisions and inequalities within com-

munities (Daniel and Mittal 2009, 10). Evidence has consistently shown that customary tenure systems and local land rights are regularly swept aside or not adequately respected in the context of foreign land deals (Anseeuw et al. 2012). Despite state efforts over the past decades, lack of legal entitlements to land means that many local claims to land fall outside of the legal and regulatory framework agreed upon by States and foreign actors, which is premised upon private ownership (Ibid). Here again we see land transfer mechanisms more resembling of Types C and D (see above), where state attempts to transfer land back to rural populations backfires by creating spaces for elite capture, private enterprise and land consolidation.

While many international organizations strongly advocate land titling as a means of safeguarding the rights of peasants living on proposed concessions (in particular Oxfam Novib), land titling and reforms can sometimes produce intense socio-cultural tensions and conflicts on the ground. Land tenure security via land reforms does not always lead to protection against land dispossession, which has been seen in the case of Mozambique, where community land titles were swept away to make way for mass sugarcane (ethanol) plantations and many were evicted from what they believed was legally titled territory (Borras and Franco 2012, 54). Processes of dispossession occurring within the context of formal 'land rights' (or titling procedures) echo Peluso and Ribot's (2003) theory of access, which broadly states that having (legal) rights to land does not ensure the ability to access it. Individual privatization of land—or the distribution of legally titled plots to smallholders—on previously customarily-owned land can in many cases lead to a situation where peasants may sell assets (i.e. land) as a means of ensuring food security or paying off debts. This is a classic example of what Harvey (2003) calls 'accumulation by dispossession', wherein the privatization and commodification of previously public assets—a key symptom of neoliberal capitalism—has the result of benefiting the wealthy and re-concentrating wealth in the hands of private enterprises or wealthy elite (again reflecting land transfer mechanisms Types C and D). We can see this becoming an increasing concern within the context of large scale investments in food production, where many countries in the global South are becoming key exporters of food and residents rely more heavily on imports for food security.

These complex dynamics of land reform and shifting socio-cultural landscapes are unpacked by the chapters in this volume, which seek to problematize the role of the state in FLAs. The following section will go into more detail by providing an overview of each chapter.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW: GLOBAL DRIVERS, LOCAL IMPACTS AND CONTESTED LANDSCAPES IN AFRICA

The following section traces the anatomy of each chapter, showing how authors speak to above-mentioned debates surrounding the role of the state in transnational, foreign and domestic land acquisitions, land reforms and privatization; they show how new landscapes are being actively produced through dynamic encounters between various actors involved in a land deal, and how these transformations affect smallholders and their families reliant on land in Africa.

Both Ben White and Annelies Zoomers lay the framework for the volume by tracing a genealogy of the converging political, economic and social structures leading to foreign land acquisitions. They also critically examine the 'regulatory model' of the World Bank. Ben White takes a historical perspective to provide a comprehensive overview of—and theoretical reflections on—the transnational character of land deals, global drivers of agrarian change over time and major discourses of legitimacy used in corporate land access strategies. He points out several contradictions to the World Bank's (2010) seminal report on foreign land acquisitions, arguing that negative impacts of land deals cannot be wholly mitigated with the Bank's proposed 'voluntary code of conduct'. Revealing various reports of human displacement, environmental degradation or social upheaval, White draws upon Olivier de Schutter to fundamentally challenge the 'regulatory' model of land investments; rather, he suggests that researchers must find an alternative model of agrarian change, premised upon improving rural livelihoods instead of feeding markets.

In contrast to White, who compares historical processes of land dispossession with the current land rush, Annelies Zoomers focuses primarily on the contemporary era (2009–present) and emphasizes the need to deepen the policy debates surrounding FLAs. She notes that broader food security and climate mitigation policies stimulate the enclosure of Africa's arable land, often superseding formal state structures, and that such debates should be part and parcel of the analysis of FLAs. Additionally, current debates about 'regulating' FLAs fail to consider the deeper political, economic and historical structures underpinning foreign land claims and acquisitions over time. Without situating these claims within the context of broader development debates, current policies aimed at protecting local land rights will inevitably fail. She goes on to state that governments have an important role to play and scholars must

look closer at how and why policies of decentralization fail within the context of FLAs.

Echoing Zoomers' call to consider broader causalities of foreign land claims, Michael Strauss argues that we must consider the role of bilateral relations in shaping land deals in Africa. He points out that scholars often neglect the state's role as both an intermediary in the business transactions but also as a key actor in the acquisition of territory itself. South Korea and Saudi Arabia, for example, are leasing thousands of hectares of land in many parts of Africa (Sudan, Ethiopia and Tanzania). Bilateral relations thus play a crucial role in shaping many land deals in Africa; Strauss points out the challenges and benefits posed to inter-state dynamics resulting from foreign land deals.

Flowing from White, Zoomers and Strauss' focus on global drivers, the following four chapters bring the global debates down to the local level and examine how projects are negotiated, implemented and structured with regard to state interventions and land reform policies. Ruben de Koning's discussion of competing claims to land in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) reveals how land access tensions between small-scale artisanal miners and large-scale mining companies play out in practice. It addresses a key point of interest in wider debates about the role of the state in foreign large-scale investments: namely, how mining projects are mediated, structured and legitimized at the national level within the context of national mining reforms which pave the way for foreign investments, and potential consequences for artisanal mining communities vying for access to the same territory. He goes further to demonstrate how the state negotiated between competing interests, noting that regional governance was strong enough to protect many artisanal land rights. He argues that local power complexes emerging around artisanal mining operations have withheld large-scale industrial investment, thereby sometimes preventing displacement of artisanal miners from concessions.

In their chapter, Andrew et al. analyze the impacts of private commercial farm conversions to wildlife tourism ('game farms') on farm dwellers in South Africa's Eastern Cape, where landless peasants live and work on white-owned farms. While some of these farm dwellers are evicted from the farms following conversion, others are contracted by owners to work on the farms as day labourers. Laying out the context for post-1994 land reform based on the already existing privatization of land under colonialism and apartheid, they trace the ways that further land enclosures for the purpose of wildlife-based tourism spread in this liberalizing environment. The authors show how conversions to game farms often involve human

displacement, the fracture of social and kin networks, migration and loss of livelihood activities (e.g. subsistence agriculture and livestock-holding). Historical power relations and racial inequalities that have persisted since apartheid have weakened state policies aiming to improve the lives of farm dwellers. Game farms are part of a broader trend of land territorialization and consolidation by the private sector, in which wildlife conservation, hunting and tourism are increasingly legitimized as spurring ‘economic growth’ and thus beneficial for both farm dwellers and landowners. Local actors (commercial farmers) have in many cases managed to align their interests with those of investors, some foreign, some domestic.

Similar to Andrew et al.’s discussion of land tenure shifts surrounding game farm conversions, Sapignoli and Hitchcock demonstrate how a land reform policy in Botswana, aimed at both reducing land degradation and improving rural incomes, failed to benefit the poorest members of the community. They specifically analyze how shifts from communal to individual (privatized) land tenure led to processes of dispossession among the San and other marginalized groups. In addition to examining the impacts of the land division into specific categories—the authors also analyze how the rural poor have responded to the reforms. Upholding the discussion of both Andrew et al. and White, they note that, since the colonial period, state efforts at land reforms intended to reduce poverty often had the opposite effect and excluded local groups, providing more land access opportunities to extra-locals.

Following upon Sapignoli and Hitchcock’s discussion of land reforms and private enclosures, Amandine et al. examine land policies leading to a national shift from smallholder supported, irrigated rice cultivation for domestic markets to foreign (and domestic) large-scale agricultural investments in the heavily irrigated ON (*Office de Nigér*) region of Mali. The authors make the important point that domestic investments in land are also driving the current land rush in Africa; and land allocation procedures often involve the re-centralisation of previously de-centralised government institutions. In some cases, land deals were negotiated with wealthy elites in government without consultation with smallholders or necessary impact assessments this led in some cases to ‘double allocation’—where land legally used by smallholders was also handed over to investors. The authors analyze both policies and regulations related to land investments as well as to what extent both small and large-scale farming can co-exist under new state laws. They unravel the various conflicts that have occurred in the ON region, some of which include displacement of smallholder communities, loss of land access and livelihood



shifts resulting from land allocations to primarily foreign companies. In doing so, they critically examine the role of smallholder agriculture in shaping Mali's domestic economy.

In a discussion of the role of the Nigerian government in paving the way for white Zimbabwean farmers to take up large-scale farming, Akachi Odoemene traces the implementation phase through an analysis of various manifestations of state and public rhetoric. Highlighting the rhetorical trope of 'New Nigeria' against the backdrop of a historical survey of Nigeria's agricultural development, land reforms and food production policies, the author demonstrates the implicit, unfavourable and historical dimensions of state discursive strategies of legitimization. In the wake of government efforts to improve agricultural practices and production, the Nigerian state drew upon a modernization discourse in pushing through various land reforms targeted at foreign investments. However, while intended to persuade the general public of the benefits of a new land order, the discursive tools used by the state produced a fierce counter rhetoric among populations.

The next four chapters in this volume examine how various actors are situated in 'place' (geographical location) and 'space' (ontological assessments of geographical place) and how this has led to 'contested landscapes' and constantly shifting land access and ownership regimes. Issues of local land use valuations, customary land ownership, land tenure and access, and privatization are examined against the backdrop of rising foreign and domestic interests in large tracts of so-called 'empty' land. These chapters show how new perceptions of 'landscapes' are molded out of dynamic interactions between foreign actors and local stakeholders. They seek to explain what underlying cultural or ideological factors play a role in contestations over territory, examining the value of land from a local perspective.

Lucjan Buchalik's discussion of the construction of a major road connection network in the Kurumba region in Burkina Faso underscores the need for understanding local conceptions and forms of land ownership within the context of foreign land deals. Examining local land tenure systems among the Voltaic peoples of Burkina Faso, he demonstrates how in the interaction between traditional practices of communal land development and state practices of it traditional and modern conceptualizations of land use merge. Two case studies illustrate the different geographical and socio-economic outcomes this merging can effect.

Taking a historical approach to analyzing 20th century South African literature within the context of the state land reforms, Gitte Postel examines historical roots of conflicting white and black discourses surround-



ing identity, belonging and land ownership in 20th century South Africa. She demonstrates that the influence of the state has been overwhelmingly effective in accommodating foreign land deals and placing the local farmers in the periphery of not only land ownership and land use but also official debates and imaginaries about land. However, conflicting discourses on land did not evaporate; they were—as an undercurrent, transformed into more symbolical forms of expression—still part of political and social/cultural discourse. Gitte Postel shows that these historical dynamics are still having an effect that is felt today.

Drawing upon empirical examples of high level politicians from the Western Highlands of Cameroon, Evelyne Tegomoh shows how internal mobility for investments in land symbolically and discursively turns 'nationals' into 'foreigners'. In doing so, she provides new insights into mobility and the impacts of FLAs on socio-cultural perceptions of belonging. Analyzing the role of elites specifically, she notes that landholders and buyers do not rely on existing land registration systems; rather, their practices are tacitly endorsed by the state in an effort to modernize agriculture. These dynamics are often accompanied by state-led land reforms, wherein the adoption of land laws opening up territory for investment has made more land available to politically and economically powerful individuals and entities.

Finally, Froukje Krijtenburg explores stakeholder conceptualisations of 'land protection' relating to Mijikenda sacred land in Kenya, whose land is potentially targeted by, foreign investors. In a joint effort to prevent foreign acquisitions of sacred Mijikenda places, local actors and a centralized state party submitted Mijikenda sacred places for inscription on the World Heritage list in 2008 and managed to have ten of them designated as World Heritage sites. The discussion explores whether indeed Mijikenda sacred land can now be considered 'protected' from foreign land acquisitions from the local perspective, by exploring the different stakeholder discourses in the context of the World Heritage inscription.

In closing, an important, general observation can be made relating to the authors' contributions described here. Overall, though in different ways, the chapters demonstrate the central role of the state (encouraged by economic policy) in creating the fertile ground for large-scale land deals, in addition to highlighting the importance of detailed empirical studies to distill the rootings and becomings of these processes. Collectively as well as individually, the following chapters enrich the global large-scale foreign land acquisition debate with persuasive statements based on nuanced analyses.

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