

Global Land Grabbing and Trajectories of Agrarian Change: A Preliminary Analysis

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'Land grab' has become a catch-all phrase to refer to the current explosion of (trans)national commercial land transactions mainly revolving around the production and export of food, animal feed, biofuels, timber and minerals. Two key dimensions of the current land grab – namely, the politics of changes in land use and property relations change (and the links between them) – are not sufficiently explored in the current literature. We attempt to address this gap by offering a preliminary analysis through an analytical approach that suggests some typologies as a step towards a fuller and better understanding of the politics of global land grabbing.

Keywords: land grab, biofuels, dispossession

INTRODUCTION

'Global land grab' has emerged as a catch-all phrase to refer to the explosion of (trans)national commercial land transactions and land speculation in recent years mainly, but not solely, around the large-scale production and export of food and biofuels.¹ The emphasis on land grabbing builds on familiar, iconic images from the past of (Northern) companies and governments enclosing commons (mainly land and water), dispossessing peasants and indigenous peoples, and ruining the environment (in the South). It rightly calls attention to the actual and potential role of current land deals in pushing a new cycle of enclosures and dispossession, and therefore the urgent need to resist them. But like all 'catch-all' phrases intended to frame and motivate political action, this one too suffers from limits and weaknesses that partly make it vulnerable to capture by undemocratic elite and corporate agendas.

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The original outline of this paper was first presented at a public forum in New York University (NYU) and at a conference in Cornell University, and the first complete draft was presented and discussed at the Agrarian Studies Colloquium at Yale University. Since then, several versions have been presented in several places, including at COHD, at the China Agricultural University in Beijing, the Yale School of Law, the University of Ottawa, Chiang Mai University in Thailand, Utrecht University in the Netherlands, the University of Toronto and the University of Leeds. We thank the participants in these fora for constructive comments, as well as Henry Bernstein, Ian Scoones, James C. Scott and the three anonymous reviewers for this *Journal* for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of the paper. The last version of the paper before this significantly changed and revised final one appeared as an ICAS Working Paper, available in English, Spanish and French editions: see <http://www.iss.nl/icas>.

¹ The authors, separately and together, gathered empirical material for the several cases cited in this paper, including field visits in Mozambique, Cambodia, Philippines, Brazil and China in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011. The average length of field visits in these countries was two weeks, examining more closely two or three specific land deals, interviewing key members of affected local communities and selected key informants (state and non-state) at the national level, and examining relevant case documents.

Initially deployed by activists opposed to such transactions from environmental and agrarian justice perspectives, the phrase has moved beyond its original radical moorings as it gets drawn into de-politicized mainstream development currents. This is seen partly in the eventual emergence of two phrases: the politically loaded phrase 'land grabbing' that continues to be used by radical social movements and their sympathizers, who first introduced it, and the de-politicized phrase 'large-scale land investments', more recently introduced and popularized by mainstream international development institutions and governments. Increasingly, the image of 'global land grabbing' is being appropriated by those bent on recasting the phenomenon as a grand opportunity to further extend capitalist agro-industry in the name of pro-poor and ecologically sustainable economic development. This dubious agenda has been undergoing consolidation around 'large-scale land investment', as a potential solution to rural poverty and the seductive call for a 'Code of Conduct' to discipline big land deals and transform them into supposedly more ethical 'win-win' outcomes (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009; World Bank 2010).

Notwithstanding that the notion of 'code of conduct' has lately generated 'Principles of Responsible Agricultural Investments' or 'RAI Principles' (World Bank 2010; World Bank et al. 2010; Deininger 2011), this kind of reaction from the World Bank and others can be seen as part of a larger trend of corporate 'extreme makeover'. As is well known, the past decades have seen the emergence of a 'corporate social responsibility agenda' in response to public and activist criticism of 'the impact of transnational corporations (TNCs) in developing countries and on the environment' (Utting 2008, 959). This agenda has emerged against the backdrop of shifting perceptions of how the market, the state and civil society function and ought to function. One prominent version of this agenda has been the World Bank's advocacy of 'good governance' as a 'persuasive ethical power that allows for [corporate] self-regulation, making it possible for governments to intervene less intrusively and more efficiently in society' (O'Laughlin 2008, 945). The notion of voluntary adherence by corporations to good business practices and ethical behaviour is a cornerstone of this advocacy, and high-profile calls for a Code of Conduct for land deals can thus be taken as one of its most recent incarnations.

Elsewhere, we have offered a critique of this initiative to regulate land grabs (Borras and Franco 2010a), which is one of many, including most prominently that of the UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter (2011), as well as Tania Li (2011). We will not deal with this debate here. Instead, in this paper we attempt to take a broader view of the politics of global land grabbing, by delving into two crucial dimensions of this phenomenon; namely, the dynamics of changes in land use and property relations, including how these two dimensions are interlinked, and why it matters. In spite of their centrality to current land-related political and policy debates, to date neither dimension has been addressed extensively or systematically enough in the emerging literature.

Much of the classic literature and theoretical formulations from political economy resonate with, and remain useful for, looking into the current global land grab. Certainly, the contemporary global land grab represents both continuity and change from previous historical episodes of enclosures, such as in the emblematic case of England and in colonial and post-colonial conditions, warranting the use of the analytical lenses of classic agrarian political economy (White and Dasgupta 2010). Some of the most relevant sources include Lenin's (1973) view that capitalist agrarian change proceeds by class differentiation in the countryside; Karl Polanyi's (1944) observation that the dispossession or displacement of people from the land brought about by capitalist intrusion into the countryside provokes a political reaction in the form of a counter-movement; and, more recently, David Harvey's (2003) view of primitive accumulation as an ongoing, uneven process accompanying capitalist development ('accumulation by

dispossession'), as well as Tania Li's (2011) emphasis on dispossessed peasants becoming 'surplus people' as the worst possible social outcomes of big land deals.

Inspired and informed by these fundamental political economy analytical traditions, we ask critical questions: Do all investments in land today constitute land grabbing? Do all changes in land use and property relations today constitute land grabbing? Does all land grabbing result in peasants' expulsion from their land? Does all land grabbing involve foreign land grabbers, and how does it matter? Do all land grabs today indeed result in important changes in land use and property relations?

Moreover, in the emerging literature on land grabbing, the objects of enquiry and analysis are not always clearly specified. Is it the transnational character of land deals that matters? Is it the kinds of crops being farmed? Or is it the *terms* of the new social relations of property, divisions of labour, distribution of income and patterns of capital investments (following the four fundamental questions of political economy proposed by Bernstein 2010) emerging from the current land deals that should be central to any critical scientific enquiry? In this paper, we deal mainly with social relations of property, with some reference to questions of labour. We also add to these questions some discussion of how land grabs shape and are shaped by dynamic ecologies (political ecology), in order to engage with the big-picture questions around land grabbing. By offering a more systematic, albeit preliminary, discussion about two key dimensions of land grabbing – namely, changes in land use and property relations – we hope to contribute towards a better understanding of the character and dynamics of current land grabbing.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, the absolute number of people living in urban centres worldwide overtook the number of people living in the countryside for the first time. This shift in the rural–urban balance is both dramatic and recent. Of a total world population of 3.7 billion people in 1970, 2.4 billion were rural dwellers and 1.3 billion were urban. The change in the agricultural/non-agricultural population has been even more dramatic since then. In 1970, the agricultural population stood at 2.0 billion people and the non-agricultural population at 1.7 billion. By 2010, they were, respectively, 2.6 billion agricultural and 4.2 billion non-agricultural. However, even as the global urban population overtakes the rural population, the absolute number of rural dwellers has continued to grow.

Moreover, the percentage of rural *poor* people continues to be higher than urban poor: three-quarters of the world's poor today live and work in the countryside. Poverty is often associated with hunger, and in 2008 there were an estimated one billion hungry people in the world (FAO 2008). At the height of the 2007–8 food price crisis, the FAO announced that in order to meet the world's growing needs, food production would have to double by 2050, with the required increase mainly in developing countries where the majority of the world's rural poor live, and where 95 per cent of the population increase during this period is expected to occur (FAO 2008).

A convergence of global crises (financial, environmental, energy, food) in recent years has contributed to a dramatic revaluation of, and rush to control, land, especially land located in the global South. The convergence of 'peak oil', anthropogenic climate change (with industrial agriculture and the transport sector combined probably contributing to more than half of greenhouse gas emissions), and persistent hunger (affecting one billion people in 2010) are located within capital's need for continuous expanded accumulation. For mainstream economists, there is a newly discovered lifeline: the putative existence of 'reserve agricultural land' in

the global South (World Bank 2010; Deininger 2011), which can be transformed into zones of investment for food, animal feed and fuel production.

Transnational and national economic actors from various big business sectors (oil and auto, mining and forestry, food and chemical, bioenergy and biotechnology, etc.) are eagerly acquiring, or declaring their intention to acquire, large swathes of land on which to build, maintain or extend large-scale extractive and agro-industrial enterprises. National governments in 'finance-rich, resource-poor' countries are looking to 'finance-poor, resource-rich' countries to help secure their own food and especially energy needs into the future. Land in the global South has been coveted for multiple reasons historically. But today, there is new momentum building behind the idea that long-term control of large landholdings beyond states' own national borders is needed to supply the food and energy needed to sustain their population and society into the future.² As a result, we see a rise in the volume of cross-border large-scale land deals. Many large-scale land deals are driven by transnational corporations (TNCs), and in some cases by foreign governments, but almost always in close partnership with national governments. On many occasions too, national governments in developing countries are actively seeking out possible land investors.

The earliest reports of a surge in (trans)national commercial land deals leading to (or threatening) a massive enclosure of remaining 'non-private' lands and to dispossession of rural poor came from radical environmental-agrarian and human rights activists. Several networks have been documenting cases of land grabbing and bringing them to public attention. A report released in 2008 by the NGO GRAIN was perhaps the first to declare a global trend in land grabbing linked to ramped-up biofuels promotion and food-for-export initiatives (GRAIN 2008). Soon, other civil society groups, of which the FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) deserves special mention, and media outlets offered additional critical accounts. In April 2009, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), a member of the CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research) and based in Washington, DC, reported that, since 2006, 15–20 million hectares of farmland in developing countries had been sold or leased, or were under negotiation for sale or lease, to foreign entities. Their report identified cases mostly in Africa.³ The London-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) followed with their own report, focusing on transnational land deals in Africa, declaring that some 2.4 million hectares of land had already been allocated, though not necessarily yet fully utilized (Cotula et al. 2009). In September 2010, the World Bank released a report on land grabbing, and offered an estimate of 45 million hectares (World Bank 2010; Deininger 2011). In addition, Visser and Spoor (2011) argue that land grabs in former Soviet Eurasia are usually neglected in land grab accounting and overly focused on Africa, and offered an initial survey of significant land deals under way in that region of the world.

Olivier de Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur for the right to food, also began to stress the potentially devastating impact of the unfolding global land grab on already deep and widespread food insecurity amongst the world's poorest. In an interview, he explained:

The countries targeted by these deals, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where labour is relatively cheap and where land is considered plentiful, will be potentially increasingly

² Food, animal feed and biofuels combined constitute an important chunk of products in all current land-grabbing activities. However, land grabs are carried out for diverse purposes beyond food, feed and fuel, to include timber and minerals. Land grabs carried out in the name of the environment, through conservation projects and REDD+ (United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) are sometimes collectively referred to as 'green grabs' (see Fairhead et al., forthcoming).

³ As reported by Reuters (2009).

dependent on international markets to achieve food security. So they will produce more food, but this food will be exported. This is one of the things we saw during the global food crisis of 2007–8. Countries that are the least self-sufficient and most dependent on international markets have been most severely affected by increasingly volatile prices.⁴

The dominant discourse amongst NGO and social movement circles, academia, think-tanks and the media offers the following characterization of the current wave of land grabs:

- (i) land-use change involves converting forest lands or lands previously devoted to food production for subsistence or domestic consumption to produce food or biofuels for export;
- (ii) it is transnational in character and driven largely by the Gulf states, Chinese and South Korean governments and companies;
- (iii) the underlying land deals increasingly involve finance capital, partly leading to speculative deals;
- (iv) these deals are often shady in character, being non-transparent, non-consultative and fraught with corruption involving national and local governments;
- (v) the deals often lead to, or have led to, dispossession when 'local communities' do not have formal, legal, and clear property rights over the contested lands; and so
- (vi) regulation of land deals is needed, whether through the Responsible Agricultural Investments (RAI) principles put forward by the World Bank, UNCTAD, IFAD and FAO, or through the Voluntary Guidelines being advocated by social movements and NGOs within the Committee on Food Security (CFS) of the FAO (see de Schutter 2011).

While valid as far as it goes, this characterization has limitations. Certain aspects of the current global land grabbing are not fully captured nor sufficiently contextualized by it. A fuller understanding of the dynamics of land grabbing requires a closer look into the emerging dynamics of changes in land use and property relations.

THE MANY FACES OF CHANGING LAND USE TODAY

To get a broader understanding of land issues today requires unpacking the vague category of 'changing land use'.⁵ Global land use today is changing not just in one direction (e.g. in favour of food or biofuel production for export); but has many faces. Figure 1 presents a typology that attempts to capture the four main, broadly distinct, directions in current land-use change. As complex realities do not fit into 'ideal types', the typology is merely intended to get us started by pointing out the main trends in land-use change today.

Within each broadly distinct type, there are additional variations that can also be identified. Table 1, then, is an attempt to capture more systematically some of the diversity and complexity of land-use change today. Each item is explained in the discussion below. The main idea here is that while the dominant narrative around global land grabbing (focused on converting lands previously dedicated to food production or forestry for domestic use to export-oriented food and biofuel production) is correct and important, it should be seen against far more diverse, complex and dynamic changes in land. It helps to give us a better idea on how and why changes in land use occur, and with what effects for those who use it. It brings in important

⁴ <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4524232,00.html> (accessed on 17 December 2009). For a more systematic critique, see de Schutter (2011).

⁵ Some parts of this section are included in a short entry by Borras in the *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, edited by M. Juergensmeyer and H. Anheier and to be published by Sage in 2012.

Figure 1 The main directions of land-use change today

Type A Food to food	Type B Food to biofuels
Type C Non-food to food	Type D Non-food to biofuels

Table 1. The character, direction and orientation of land-use change

<i>Ideal type</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>
A	Food production	Food production
A1	Food for consumption	Food for domestic exchange
A2	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Food for export
A3	Food for export, monocropping and industrial farming	Food for consumption and domestic exchange, small-scale polyculture
B	Food production	Biofuel production
B1	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Biofuels for export
B2a	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Biofuels for local use and domestic exchange, but corporate-controlled
B2b	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Biofuels for local use and domestic exchange, non-corporate-controlled
C	Non-food	Food production
C1	Forest lands	Food for consumption, domestic exchange
C2	Forest lands	Food for export
C3	'Marginal', 'idle' lands	Food for consumption, domestic exchange
C4	'Marginal', 'idle' lands	Food for export
D	Forest and marginal/idle lands	Biofuel production
D1	Forest lands	Biofuels for use and domestic exchange
D2	Forest lands	Biofuels for export
D3	'Marginal' and 'idle' lands	Biofuels for use and domestic exchange
D4	'Marginal' and 'idle' lands	Biofuels for export

Note: Shaded rows represent those types that are the object of anti-land grabbing views and political campaigns; they all represent change from local/domestic use to production for export.

dynamics missing from the dominant land grab narrative, and enables us to situate our analysis of land-use changes in the latest wave of capitalist penetration of the countryside of the world.

Type A: Land-use Change within Food-oriented Production

In Type A, lands remain within food production, but the purposes for which food is produced have changed. In aggregated official censuses of land use, these changes are not always captured.

There are three sub-categories: A1, A2 and A3. A1 involves lands previously dedicated to food production for consumption that are then converted to food production for domestic exchange – also commonly known as the commoditization of food production. This is perhaps one of the most extensive types of land-use change historically, and one most extensively studied in agrarian political economy. It is an integral component of capital accumulation in the countryside that accounts for everyday forms of peasant dispossession (Hall et al. 2011), often through social differentiation of the peasantry (Lenin 2004). As the price of food rises, more peasants tend to sell some or all of their food harvest to the market to get more money; or to be drawn to ‘boom’ crops in ways linked to the accumulation–dispossession dynamic of commoditization (Hall 2011). If the population of the world continues to increase at the current pace, somehow new lands will have to be put to agricultural cultivation to produce more food. By 2005, the total cultivated land in the world was 1.5 billion hectares. From 1990 to 2005, a yearly average increase of 2.7 million hectares was put to agricultural use, while ‘declines in industrialized and transition countries (–0.9 and –2 million ha, respectively) . . . were more than outweighed by increases of 5.5 million ha per year in developing countries’ (World Bank 2010, x). Not all of this new cultivation was devoted to food crops, though, and it included large-scale tree plantings for the pulp industry (*ibid.*, xi).

A2 involves lands previously devoted to food production for consumption or domestic exchange, which are then converted to food production for export: the focus of the current global land grab and its critics.⁶ Although this kind of change is not new, it has some new features that contribute to making it even more controversial. First, A2 involves a new set of non-traditional land-grabbing countries (e.g. oil-rich Gulf States, South Korea, Japan, China and India), alongside the more traditional ones. The 2007–8 world food crisis (see Bello 2009; Holt-Giménez and Patel, with Shattuck 2009) prompted many of these newer, non-traditional players to begin transacting foreign land deals as a way to ensure their own national food security. Second, whether traditional or non-traditional, today’s land grabbers are gaining control of land through a combination of land purchases (where possible), long-term leases of up to 99 years (where allowed) and contracting with small-scale farmers, where this is safer and more profitable than buying or leasing land. Third, as already indicated, the pace of land-use conversion in this sub-category alone is quite rapid and extensive (Cotula et al. 2009).

Finally, A3 involves land previously devoted to food and feed production for export (especially large farms), which is then converted into small-scale family farm units, mainly for food production for use and domestic exchange. This includes land-reform settlements created from redistributed plantations. Examples are land-reform settlements in Brazil, where large private sugarcane plantations or cattle ranches were redistributed and converted by land-reform beneficiaries to subsistence-oriented food production. Other examples are those in the banana and sugarcane sectors in the Philippines, oil palm plantations in Indonesia, and commercial tobacco and cereal farms and ranches in Zimbabwe.

Type B: Land-use Change from Food to Biofuel Production

In Type B, we see the popular protest line against the TNC-driven shift ‘from feeding people in developing countries to fuelling cars in the industrialized world’. Converting food lands to biofuel production for export is another feature of current (trans)national commercial land deals. In fact, it turns out that the majority of current land deals are not for food production, but for biofuels and other industrial products (World Bank 2010; HLPE 2011). Sub-categories

⁶ This includes feed for export; for example, soya and maize.

can be distinguished. B1 involves lands dedicated to food production (whether for consumption, domestic exchange or export) being converted to biofuel production for export. This is the main land-use change that has drawn fire from activists worldwide, and which even mainstream development agencies and (inter)governmental entities such as the European Union (EU) are now (or have been made) sensitive to, extending the debate over the issue of EU biofuel policy impacts on (in)direct land-use change or 'ILUC'. It is this type of land-use change that most evidently exemplifies the logic of contemporary capitalist development and its global patterns of production and consumption.⁷

B1 is generally corporate-driven. Corporate-driven biofuel for export usually requires large-scale financing, monocropping, industrial-scale production and processing, and new transportation infrastructure. This type of operation is likely to be adopted in ethanol production, as exemplified by the Brazilian sugarcane (Wilkinson and Herrera 2010) and the US corn ethanol industries (Gillon 2010). With feedstocks such as *jatropha*, castor or coconut, biodiesel can also involve small-scale, community-based type operation. However, for the corporate biodiesel business, industrial operation is required to achieve business viability, as exemplified by the scaling-up of *jatropha* production currently attempted in numerous countries today. Other biodiesel feedstocks are also used mainly in large, monocropping, industrial operations, particularly oil palm (e.g. McCarthy 2010) and soya (e.g. Fernandes et al. 2010), usually with the (at times adverse) incorporation of small growers.

The pace of land-use change in B1 has been quite rapid in some countries where biofuel feedstocks have been introduced only recently. Like that of A2 (food for export), the extent of B1 is difficult, if not impossible, to pin down for various reasons – although findings from recent research on land grabbing suggest that most current land deals are in fact for biofuel production (see, e.g., Deininger 2011), extractive industries (including timber) and conservation purposes (see, e.g., Corson 2011; Kelly 2011). The situation is fluid, making it difficult to monitor and classify lands that are merely being 'eyed' for biofuel projects, or are still at the planning stage. Even those already subject to formal agreements might still lack implementation, which was the case in 70 per cent of all land deals in Africa by late 2010, according to the World Bank (2010). Experience shows that it is also difficult to monitor actual change on lands that have already been allocated, and where conversion from food to biofuel production is already under way.

By early 2011, newspaper reports remain the main source of global monitoring of the extent of this type of land-use change; while useful, they may not always be precise or up to date (more accurate data should become available soon, as scientific field studies start to report their findings⁸). For example, the Philippines has always been reported as the site of extensive land grabbing, with between 1.4 and 2.5 million hectares subject to deals with China, South Korea and Middle Eastern countries for export production of food and biofuel. However, initial talks and a formal memorandum of agreement signed between the governments of the Philippines and China have not been followed up, partly because of protests from Philippine civil society groups. The same occurred with the reported allocation of 1.3 million hectares in Madagascar, yet such data continue to appear in the accounting of global land grabbing.⁹ For B1, it seems that the socio-political processes through which land-use changes occur are marked by

⁷ See the *Journal of Peasant Studies* special issue on 'Biofuels, Land and Agrarian Change' (October 2010), especially articles by Novo et al. (2010), Ariza et al. (2010), Franco et al. (2010) and McCarthy (2010).

⁸ One of the global initiatives on academic research on land grabbing is the one coordinated by the loose network Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI): <http://www.iss.nl/ldpi>.

⁹ Of course, it is possible that negotiations for land transactions in these countries will be resurrected in the future. See von Braun and Meinzen-Dick (2009) for further examples.

manoeuvring by national and local governments and TNCs, ranging from promises of a better livelihood and employment, to deceit, coercion and violence. Vermeulen and Cotula (2010) offer an insightful mapping of the political dynamics of coercion and consent in affected communities in Africa. The expansion of oil palm in Colombia has been associated with paramilitary activities in contested lands; paramilitary activity forces people to abandon their lands, which are then converted to oil palm plantations (Ballvè 2011; Grajales 2011). In the Brazilian state of São Paulo, the promise of better livelihoods under lease arrangements and job employment have induced many land-reform beneficiaries to abandon their land-reform settlements and lease them to sugarcane companies;¹⁰ to a lesser extent, this is similar to what is happening in the province of Isabela in the Philippines with the country's largest operational sugarcane ethanol project.¹¹ In Cambodia, the opening up of a major sugarcane plantation in Kampong Speu province has required the forced eviction of existing farmers and communities (Borras and Franco 2011).

Meanwhile, B2 involves the conversion of lands under food cultivation (whether for consumption, domestic exchange or export) to biofuel production for local consumption and the domestic market. This type of change is almost always subsumed by B1 in the general discourse. It is generally assumed that recent initiatives around biofuels are mainly corporate-driven and for export. Where this is so, then the radical critique holds, yet it fails to recognize situations in which biofuels are produced for local use and/or local markets – an area of activity that has been receiving increasing attention. There are two sub-types in this category.

B2a is corporate-driven biofuel production for local markets, where the companies may be either domestic or foreign. For example, in the Philippines, the coco-diesel sector is dominated by domestic capital (mainly Chinese-Filipino capitalists already engaged in the coconut oil business), the capital-intensive sugarcane ethanol sector is driven largely by foreign capital (the Isabela case mentioned above, for example, involves Japanese and Taiwanese investors, as well as Virginia, USA-based, tobacco transnational capital, in conjunction with Philippine agribusiness), while other foreign investors (South Korean, Spanish and Swedish companies, among others) are trying to develop the commercial potential of *jatropha* via modest but significant initial capitalization.¹² Most of this biofuel production is destined for the domestic market, and in some cases, planned for electricity generation rather than transport. For the latter, the national 5 per cent mandatory blending requirement for biodiesel was already met in early 2009 through the production and processing of coconut-based biodiesel. The (domestic) corporate sector has been lobbying to increase the mandatory blending requirement. The Philippines also imports ethanol from various sources, providing the basis for business advocacy to produce ethanol locally.¹³ In Mozambique, the national government aspires (at least officially) to develop its biofuel sector, which is largely owned by foreign investors, partly for domestic needs, since roughly two-thirds of the country does not have access to electricity (Borras et al. 2011).¹⁴

B2b is a small- to medium-scale non-corporate-driven production of biofuel (mainly biodiesel) at the community level for household needs and for fuel for local transport. This is being discussed and experimented with by community organizations, local governments, NGOs and agrarian movements, from the Philippines to Brazil, and from Kenya to India. Biofuel

¹⁰ Based on field investigation by Borras in the sugarcane belt of the State of São Paulo in April 2008. See also Monsalve et al. (2008).

¹¹ Based on field investigation by Franco in February 2011.

¹² Data based on separate field investigations by the authors in Isabela and in several provinces in southern Philippines (Mindanao) in 2010 and 2011.

¹³ For a useful background on the politics of biofuels policy-making in the Philippines, see Montefrio (2011).

¹⁴ Data partly based on separate and joint field visits by the authors in Mozambique in 2010.

feedstocks are intercropped with existing food production. The Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil floats the idea of alternative biofuel production in the context of 'energy sovereignty'. João Pedro Stedile (2007) of MST has summarized the fundamental principles that are likely to guide B2b in organized social movements affiliated with Via Campesina and its allies:

Among our bases and with our movements, in relation to the production of agrofuels by small farmers and peasants, we should discuss a political orientation of production based on the principles of food sovereignty and of energy sovereignty. This means we should be saying that all agricultural production of a country, of a people, should in the first place ensure the production and the consumption of healthy food for all. And that the production of agrofuels should always be in second place, in a secondary form. It should be based on the energy needs of each community and people. And agrofuels should never be produced for export.

Respecting these principles we can think of new methods for the production of agrofuels that in fact do not worsen the environment, that do not substitute for food, but at the same time can represent an increase in income for the peasants and sovereignty in the energy that they use.

So we can stipulate that agrofuels can only be produced using polycultures, from various complementary sources . . . That only 20% of each production unit can be used for agrofuels . . . And that fuels should be produced in small and medium-sized cooperatively-owned manufacturing units. And they should be installed in rural communities, small settlements, and small cities in such a way that each town, settlement, and city cooperatively produces the energy they need.

There can be small-scale, community-based biodiesel production subsumed within an emerging corporate controlled biofuel complex, as in Tamil Nadu, India (Ariza et al. 2010); community-based production, with a strategic basis in either small-scale farming and local community versus corporate control, as in various cases of competing alternatives in Brazil (Fernandes et al. 2010); or situations in which various actors compete to control the process, as in the case of *jatropha* in Kenya (Hunsberger 2010). Even the World Bank (2010) is pushing for smallholder-based production of food and biofuel, such as oil palm in Indonesia, again with very different meanings, purposes and implications.

Type C: Lands Devoted to Non-food Uses Converted to Food Production

Type C settings involve lands devoted to 'non-food' land uses being converted to food production. The term 'non-food lands' is used here loosely for lands not primarily devoted to food production, although there may be some food production in these spaces. Forest land is included in this category despite the fact that forests supply important food items to many people. Tracing the direction of land-use change, we can detect four broad patterns. Type C1 represents settings where forest lands and other non-food lands (e.g. grasslands) are converted to food production for consumption and/or local exchange. This is an almost everyday occurrence in many agrarian societies and a common subject of studies in agrarian political economy.

Type C2 involves settings where lands devoted to forest or other non-food purposes are converted to food production for export. This type of change is now often depicted as the clearing and destruction of forests, from Indonesia to Brazil to Cambodia, in order to sustain a wasteful lifestyle of overconsumption abroad. But as a type of change, the phenomenon is

certainly not new and began during the colonial era (for a food regime analysis, see Friedmann and McMichael 1989; also Weis 2010). The rise in demand for cheap meat-based fast food in the North since the 1970s has resulted in the further clearing of forests in the South to open up new frontiers for cattle production, and the growing livestock sector in the North (including China) requires cheap animal feed, contributing to the renewed clearing of forests for a new cultivation frontier – for example, the expansion of soya in South America. The more recent land rush for food for export has thus pushed an already thin land frontier even further. The renewed penetration into the Amazon is a clear example. Most of these production expansion initiatives are corporate-driven (domestic and transnational), but with active encouragement from national governments. The pace and extent of expansion is both rapid and extensive. Alongside A2 and B1, C2 is among the most controversial and protested land-use change pattern today.

C3 shows settings where lands dedicated to non-forest uses (such as grasslands, wetlands and ‘wastelands’) are converted to food for consumption and domestic exchange. Similar to C1, this is also a regular, everyday occurrence in the agrarian world, occurring as part of the livelihood strategies of farmers. C4 represents settings of the same type as in C3, but involving conversions from non-forest use to food for export. For example, many wetlands in the South have been converted to fishponds to produce high-value export commodities (shrimp, fish and so on). In terms of its nature, direction, pace, extent and socio-political process, this type is similar to A2, B1 and C2, the most protested processes, but because C4 does not directly involve lands dedicated to food or forest, at least in terms of official land-use classification, it is not usually as controversial as forest lands.¹⁵

Type D settings are lands dedicated to forest and ‘marginal/idle’ lands being converted to biofuel production. There are at least four types. D1 represents lands dedicated to forest uses that are converted to biofuel production for local consumption or exchange. This is the small-scale production of biofuel as an alternative source of renewable energy: local production for local consumption. The biofuel (mainly biodiesel) may be used as fuel for local transport, to provide a general energy source in the village and to run small (farm) machines, or produced to sell to the local market. These schemes are usually initiated by NGOs, peasant organizations and local governments. This was what some villagers in the province of Maputo in Mozambique envisaged when they heard the president of the country promoting *jatropha* on the radio, and they then cleared part of the village forest to plant *jatropha*. Two years into production, without any supply of farm inputs or other external support, the *jatropha* plants were slowly being overtaken by grass and the villagers were disheartened.¹⁶ Similar cases have been examined in Kenya, where donor agencies and NGOs have pushed for the cultivation and processing of *jatropha*, by Hunsberger (2010), and in Brazil by Fernandes et al. (2010).

D2 shows the same type of forest lands being converted to biofuel production for export. Joining A2, B1 and C2, D2 is another controversial type of land-use change: clearing forests in the South in order to fuel cars in the North, with the biofuel expansion into the Brazilian Amazon and the massive clearing of Indonesian forests again providing two of the most important and dramatic examples. Often corporate-driven, with both transnational and domestic corporate involvement, the wealth created in this process tends to be concentrated in the hands of just a few companies. As in C2, the pace and extent of land-use conversion here appears to be rapid and widespread.

¹⁵ However, grasslands and wetlands often have critical ecological functions, such as in the case of the Brazilian *cerrado*, leading to increasing attention to these issues by environmental justice activists.

¹⁶ Together with an international delegation from various social movement organizations and NGOs, the authors visited the village and interviewed its farmers in August 2009.

D3 represents settings in which lands officially classified as not devoted to food or forest uses are converted to biofuel production for consumption or domestic exchange. These are the object of the key drivers of biofuels: 'marginal', 'idle', 'waste lands' and so on. The World Bank (2010) has estimated the global area of such land as 1.7 billion hectares (see Deininger 2011). The biofuels produced from these lands can be for consumption by either the producers (village) or for domestic (local and national) markets. For the former, the key drivers are usually local governments, NGOs and farmers' organizations. For the latter, they are usually corporate-driven (local or foreign corporations). Meanwhile, D4 represents settings in which lands of the same type as in D3 are converted to biofuel production for export. As with D3, D4 is where the sales pitch of all the corporate and governmental advocates of biofuels is located. The argument is that biofuel production will not undermine existing food production and forests, because new initiatives will be located outside existing forests and food production sites (Deininger 2011).

For Types D3 and D4, the key assumption is that there is a substantial supply of available 'marginal', 'idle' and 'waste' lands worldwide, as indicated earlier. But this notion is highly problematic and increasingly contested. An area can be seen as grassland, and therefore marginal, even though it may well be part of a traditional way of farming with or part of pastoralists' seasonal herding practices, or a space valued as a buffer zone. It may have a particular cultural or ecological significance. Typically, however, corporate and governmental drivers of biofuel production base their characterizations on official – that is, state – classifications of land. State-centric land-use classifications – such as 'marginal lands', 'empty lands' and so on – have become the defining concepts in development processes, whether or not they have any basis in reality. State categorizations of land use and land property, which signal what Scott (1998) calls 'state simplification', have become key operational mechanisms through which land-use changes are facilitated.

To illustrate, after the food crisis in 2007–8, the Philippine government used data based on official land classifications to identify lands that could be allocated to intensified food and biofuel (*jatropha* and other) production, and aggressively encouraged domestic and foreign capital to seize investment opportunities in the countryside. In 2009, the government allocated 1 million hectares of so-called 'marginal' and 'uninhabited' lands for a joint venture investment by the Malaysian Kuok Group of Companies and the Filipino San Miguel Corporation (SMC). According to the companies' official declarations, the joint venture aims to help the government achieve food security by transforming marginal, idle and uninhabited lands into productive spaces. However, field investigation in Davao del Norte province in Mindanao revealed that the lands allocated there are in fact significantly populated, contrary to the official census, which describes them as uninhabited, and productively used, contrary to reports that they are marginal and idle (Borras and Franco 2011).¹⁷ Similarly, in Mozambique, the Procana biofuels project in the southern province of Gaza (which eventually closed in December 2010) occupied land offered to investors as marginal and underutilized. In fact, hundreds of people live and earn their living from this land, as livestock farmers and cultivators, and charcoal makers. The 30,000-hectare plantation was located adjacent to the huge new Massingir dam and the Dos Elefantos river. One must wonder how such an agro-ecological zone could have been categorized as marginal (Borras et al. 2011). Likewise, villagers in Kampong Speu in Cambodia were forcibly evicted from a 20,000 hectare area of ostensibly empty land to make way for a new sugarcane plantation.¹⁸

¹⁷ Borras carried out field visits in some of the lands allocated to this project in Davao del Norte province in 2010.

¹⁸ Borras carried out field investigation in this particular case in 2010.

Further Discussion on Land-use Change

A few analytical points can be highlighted. First, a conceptual and empirical mapping of the nature and direction of land-use change is relevant, because land-based social relations can vary from one broadly distinct agrarian setting to the next: from predominantly Western-style private property rights regimes to more customary non-Western ones, to varied combinations of the two; and from more traditional extensive ways of farming to other more intensive industrial ways, and so on. Given such diversity, the dynamics of land-use change and its implications for different social classes and groups will likewise be diverse, calling for more nuanced empirical research and political advocacy and action. State simplification processes do just that – they simplify complex and diverse agrarian universes, to avoid and dismiss phenomena that may derail formal land-use categorization and land property standardization. Analyses, frameworks and policies that narrowly follow neat state categories of land use are unable to acknowledge the complex details of land-based social relations in reality – the very thing that ought to be the object of analysis in the first place. More analytical clarity will facilitate application of the classic conceptual foundations (enclosure, accumulation, dispossession, differentiation and so on) indicated earlier. The difficult challenge is how to differentiate processes of dispossession that are part of everyday dynamics of accumulation, differentiation and dispossession/displacement, whether in Leninist or Chayanovian variants (see Chayanov 1986), from new forms and rivers of contemporary land grab-induced accumulation, differentiation and displacement/dispossession. Our current limitation in empirically and analytically distinguishing these two broad types will necessarily restrict our understanding of the character, meaning and implications of contemporary land grabs.¹⁹

Second, changes in land use that may strategically undermine the socially differentiated ‘rural poor’ occur not only in forms that are obviously detestable (A2, B1, C2, C4, D2 and D4; forest land or land for food production for consumption and domestic market converted to food and biofuel production *for export* – see Table 1). They also occur in other forms, such as conversion to commercial–industrial production of food and biofuel for *domestic* exchange. Linked to this is the need, analytically and politically, to take a disaggregated view of the ‘rural poor’. Here, we use the term in a loose manner to mean rural working classes, including poor peasants, small-scale farmers, landless rural labourers, indigenous peoples, pastoralists and subsistence fishers – both male and female. Land-use change will have different impacts on these various strata of the rural poor and between them and rich farmers, landlords, moneylenders and traders (the ‘non-poor’). It is not possible to fully understand the differential impact of land-use change on the ‘rural poor’ without deploying class analysis (see Bernstein 2010). For example, rich peasants renting out some parts of their lands under arrangements with estates, while farming the remainder themselves, are in a more advantageous position than cash-strapped poor farmers leasing out their entire plots and then seeking (part-time, precarious) employment as labourers on estates. Both are integrated into the emerging plantation enclaves, but on very different terms.²⁰

Third, not all changes in land use are ‘bad’ for the rural poor and the environment. Far-reaching land-use change is needed in order to reverse past and current dominance of, and trends towards, monocultures and industrial farming that result from corporate-driven

¹⁹ One reason for the difficulty in disentangling this complexity is the lack of common understanding on the definition of land grabs, upon which the scope of land deals can be assessed.

²⁰ In some mega land deals, various arrangements (such as leasing a portion of a farmer’s plot, or the entire plot, for instance) occur simultaneously. This is the case in Jambi, Indonesia, as studied by McCarthy (2010), and also in Isabela, Philippines, which is currently being investigated by Franco.

agriculture. This is the classic scenario in radical activists' framing of their critique: *industrial farming means agriculture without people*. It means *land-grabbing* and *labour-saving/labour-expelling* land investments, processes captured in Tania Li's formulation (Li 2011, 286) that 'their land is needed, but their labour is not'. While some TNC-driven institutional arrangements do not resort to large-scale industrial farming, such as numerous contract farming schemes with small-scale farmers, such schemes typically result in monocropping (e.g. Indonesian oil palm). Meanwhile, for a sharper analysis and a stronger campaign against TNC-driven food and biofuel production for export, it is necessary to connect with emerging alternatives; for example, 'food sovereignty' and 'energy sovereignty', possibly around B2b, C1, C3, D1 and D3 (see Table 1).

Fourth, there is a need for careful empirical enquiry to find out 'who was dispossessed, why, how and to what extent?' John McCarthy's study of some Indonesian oil palm plantations is illustrative of a differentiated impact: some farmers were dispossessed and displaced, others were not (McCarthy 2010). Land dispossession is not always the hallmark of major land deals in land-abundant Africa and former Soviet Eurasia (Visser and Spoor 2011), nor elsewhere, such as in the several cases in the Philippines previously mentioned.

Fifth, while there are struggles against the TNC-driven food-biofuel agro-industrial complex, it is not always the case that the rural poor participate in or support such struggles. It is often *taken for granted*, rather than empirically demonstrated, that such mega land deals are 'bad' for the 'local people and communities' and are, or ought to be, opposed by them. This is problematic. Empirically, the use of a disaggregated, class analytical lens to examine the social and political reactions by the rural poor is likely to reveal that the impacts of land-use change – as well as the responses to it – are highly differentiated between different social groups and classes among the rural poor, and between them and the non-poor: this is illustrated again by the case of Procana in Mozambique, the Brazilian cases studied by Fernandes et al. (2010), the differences within and between villages in McCarthy's study of the Indonesian oil palm plantations, and the study of the *jatropha* investments in Tamil Nadu by Ariza et al. (2010). There are numerous potential fault lines around this issue, including between environmental and agrarian justice movements (e.g. competing concerns between strategic ecological issues versus calculations around practical livelihoods), between small-scale farmers and landless rural labourers, between different agrarian movements with different social class bases and ideological standpoints (examined by Borras 2010), between organized social movements and unorganized rural poor communities, and so on. Phrases and notions such as 'local people' or the 'local community' often conceal more than they reveal, in terms of the actual political dynamics around land-use change. In many settings, local people and local communities include elite local chiefs, corrupt petty officials, local bosses, local bullies, moneylenders, landlords and rich farmers, who have competing class interests that are different from, and typically opposed to, the interests of small farmers or landless labourers. The fact that it was the *local* chiefs who signed the lease agreement for the 30,000 hectares in Procana, despite opposition from many subsistence farmers (Borras et al. 2011), serves as a reminder of the importance of a differentiated view of local communities, based on class and gender, as well as race and ethnicity, which remains a critical starting point (Bernstein 2010).

Sixth, corporate-driven land-use change is not always precisely about 'land-use change' but, rather, 'crop-use change' – which is distinct from the former, although the two are often conflated in the literature. The current promotion of biofuels does not always lead to changes in the use of land, but in some cases involves changes in how existing crops are used. Key examples here are soya in Argentina, oil palm in Indonesia and coconut in the Philippines (for biodiesel), as well as sugarcane in South Africa and the Philippines and corn-for-feed in the United States (for ethanol). The nature, direction, pace and extent of the socio-political

processes that come with each type of change (land use versus crop use) are not necessarily always the same. The change in the US Midwest Corn Belt that has caused a tsunami worldwide in terms of food prices over the past few years did not strictly involve land-use change but crop-use change, although some land-use change occurred later, when lands previously in the set-aside programme or planted with other crops were converted to corn-for-ethanol production (Gillon 2010). The story of how Europe is becoming the world's largest biodiesel producer, with rapeseed as the main feedstock, is similar (Franco et al. 2010). Whether and to what extent crop-use change will expand in the near future will depend on the relative profitability of these ventures. Whether, and how much, crop-use change might undermine food security will depend on the location of feedstock cultivation in the domestic market food supply in producing countries.

Seventh, the recent discourse on land-use change has focused on the transnational dimension, with particular emphasis on the so-called 'new' land grabbers; namely, the Gulf States, China, South Korea and India. While important, the narrow focus on 'nationality' has inadvertently de-emphasized the key complementary or independent role played by domestic and transnational capital, as well as by other transnational players. It may also inadvertently lead to flawed claims. Not all transactions related to food involving the Gulf states, China and South Korea ought to be construed as 'land grabbing'; nor is all global land grabbing limited to those states. Also it must be recognized that key actors in Brazilian, Malaysian, Cambodian, Philippine, Indian and Indonesian land grabs, among others, are mainly national capitals. Transnational-*regional* players in the South play a key role in many countries: Vietnamese and Thai companies in Cambodia and Laos, South African companies in Africa (Hall 2011), and Brazilian companies in South America (Mackey 2011). If we include so-called 'internal land grabbing', such as in China, or the situation in India, where a lot of land grabbing is actually for non-agricultural purposes, including mining, industrial and infrastructural development, business parks, residential and other real estate (Levien 2011), then the overall picture widens even further. Meanwhile, the traditional (European and North American) land grabbers remain just as entrenched, directly and indirectly: for example, a London-based company in Procana, American companies in Brazil, and how EU biofuels policy drives much of the land rush to the global South. The point is that the object of analysis should remain focused on the *character and terms* of agrarian change brought about by land-use change which is, in turn, induced by the new, emerging global agro-food-energy complex, and not principally on the nationality of the land grabbers (see Borras et al. 2010; Borras and Franco 2011).

Eighth, while analysis and research of large-scale land-use change from food or forest land use to food and biofuel production is necessary and urgent, the social and political dynamics of land-use change brought about by converging food, energy and environmental crises are complex, within and far beyond the boundaries of recent large-scale land acquisitions by TNCs and foreign governments. 'Host' governments engage in massive enclosures by speculating on possible fortunes from (trans)national commercial land deals in the forms of an anticipated expanding tax base, the extension of state spaces, foreign exchange earnings and opportunities for rent-seeking. The food-versus-fuel land-use discourse inadvertently risks serving the basic interest of nation-states by providing a 'moral' argument to engage in new food and biofuel production outside of already neatly demarcated private property on vaguely categorized 'public lands' generally assumed to be 'underutilized', 'marginal' and 'idle', despite contrary existing realities.

In short, a fuller understanding of the character of land-use change brought about by (trans)national commercial land deals requires empirical research and theorizing that are able to cover the breadth and diversity of the actually existing social conditions and dynamics: some are

changes that result in increased food production, while others are not; some result in massive harm to the biophysical environment, while others do not. It is equally important to understand how these various directions in land-use change (re)shape one another. The mapping offered in this section hopes to contribute towards this effort. Yet, while mainstream institutions tend to focus on, and limit their attention to, issues of land-use change, albeit in narrow technical terms, this cannot be understood fully without examining closely the dynamics of related changes in land property relations, which connect directly to burning global issues of enclosure and dispossession.

THE MANY DIRECTIONS OF CHANGES IN LAND PROPERTY RELATIONS TODAY

Political dynamics around land property relations related to current (trans)national commercial land deals can be seen on two fronts.²¹ On the one hand, we see dominant social classes and groups (e.g. landlords, capitalists, traditional village chiefs) and state bureaucrats who, in various ways, have some pre-existing private access to and/or control over land resources, trying to cash in on revalued land property either by consolidating and expanding landholdings and selling or leasing them out to new investors, or by incorporating themselves in the new food and energy agro-industrial complex in a variety of ways. This is evident in many countries today, including Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia,²² Indonesia and many countries in Africa. Moreover, some of these economically and politically dominant classes and groups and other corporate interests have expanded their food and biofuel production by swallowing up smaller farm units by purchase or lease. This is partly the way in which the sugarcane belt of Brazil has been expanding.²³ The first front, then, is private property in land *de jure* and *de facto*.

On the other hand, and the main and much bigger target of current worldwide massive enclosures, are broadly and vaguely labelled 'non-private'/'public' (Franco 2009). This land category is huge. It comprises the majority of land in Africa (World Bank 2003, xviii); 70 per cent of Indonesia's land, which is officially categorized as 'state forest land', despite (un)official private appropriation and use of these lands, many of which in reality are productive farmlands under different farming systems (Peluso 1992); and in the Philippines, where only 3.5 million of 12 million hectares of arable land is formally private property (Borras 2007), the government's hopes to cash in on the rest, officially designated as 'non-private' lands. In absolute terms, the World Bank (2010) has come up with an estimate of between 445 million and 1.7 billion hectares worldwide of potentially 'suitable' lands assumed to be 'marginal', 'underutilized', 'empty' and 'available', most of which are classified as public lands (Deininger 2011).

Massive enclosures on these two combined broad fronts (private and non-private) manifest 'accumulation by dispossession', in Harvey's term (2003), driven by the imperatives of capitalist development and expansion in the context of converging food, energy, financial and environmental crises, and facilitated by hi-tech gadgetry (computerized recording, satellite mapping and so on) deployed in the name of clearer, cheaper and faster land management, so-called efficient 'land governance'. The dominant discourse of critics is that contemporary land grabbing results in mass dispossession but, as mentioned earlier, a quick survey of many major land deals today

²¹ Parts of this section are drawn from Borras and Franco (2010b), especially the discussion of the typology of changing land property relations.

²² See Mackey (2011) for the Bolivian case and Grajales (2011) for the Colombian case.

²³ Based on the field investigation carried out by Borras in the state of São Paulo in 2008. See also Novo et al. (2010).

shows that the changes in land property relations that they generate are highly varied. Dispossession/displacement was certainly an outcome in Kampong Speu in Cambodia (mentioned above), which involved formally classified secondary public forest land. But the outcome was more varied in the three villages studied by McCarthy in Indonesia, involving both private and public lands, while the Mozambican case (Procana) involved community lands redistributed under previous land reforms and guaranteed by the 1997 Land Law. What these cases tell us is that land property relations in these land deals are varied and their outcomes likewise differentiated, which has implications for policy and political advocacy. For example, demanding land reform is not very convincing in cases where land-reformed communities are among those involved (e.g. the Procana case in Mozambique, the various cases studied by Fernandes et al. in Brazil, and several of the landholdings involved in the Isabela sugarcane ethanol case in the Philippines). Alternatively, arguing that ‘“local people” got dispossessed through these land deals because they do not have secure land rights’ cannot easily explain the Procana case in Mozambique, where land rights are guaranteed by perhaps one of the most progressive land laws in Africa. There are multiple tensions and puzzles that emerge around questions of changes in land property relations in current global land-grabbing discourse, for which a better analytical handle is needed.

Land-based Social Relations, Not Things

Most fundamental to understanding the political dynamics of change in land property relations is to know the direction of the transfer of *effective control* over land-based wealth and power caused by a policy (or absence of it). By ‘ownership and/or control over land resources’, we mean the *effective control* over the nature, pace, extent and direction of surplus production, distribution and disposition (Borrás 2007). Such a framing permits detection of actually existing land-based social relations regardless of what official documents claim, and whether on lands classified as private or public. It also makes possible a disaggregated view of the competing social classes linked to each other by their varying relationships to land.

Land policies neither emerge from, nor are carried out, in a vacuum. Emerging out of and embedded in existing power configurations, there is a strong tendency for the changes wrought by land policies to favour (or end up favouring) dominant landed classes and groups, as well as powerful state officials and bureaucrats. Land laws and policies are neither self-interpreting nor self-implementing, and it is in the interactions between various, often conflicting, actors within the state and in society that land policies are interpreted, activated and implemented (or not) in a variety of ways, from one place to another and over time (Franco 2008; see also Roquas 2002; Sikor and Lund 2009). Moreover, land-based social relations vary from one historical–institutional setting to the next, shaped by specific socio-economic, political, cultural and historical factors. Hence land-based social relations are dynamic phenomena that overflow time-frames such as those that mark development projects. Rather, land-based social relations can continue changing long after a land titling project or a land-reform programme has officially ended. This also means that there is no necessary correspondence between what official documents say about a particular landholding and what actually exists there. Changes on one plane (e.g. on paper or on the ground) may or may not reflect changes on the other; indeed, formal titles can be granted without changing any land-based relations on the ground; or, land-based social relations may alter dynamically over time, while the official property classifications remain static. Finally, it is worth stressing that property rights and land policies are often the focus of very particularized contestation and struggle between different social classes and interest groups, and between the latter and the state, and that multiple state land

policies – in the form of land reform, land restitution, land tenure reform, land stewardship and so on – have become the norm in many national settings.

Given all this, and more urgently now in light of the surge in global land grabbing today, the key task is to look beyond what state-simplified standard categories on property rights conceal (Scott 1998), to examine actually existing land-based social relations in order to understand the dynamics of changes that are occurring. This view contrasts sharply with the ongoing preoccupation of mainstream development institutions with cranking out as many land titles as possible, so that they can be used as collateral in financial transactions, or so that the state can tax the rural poor (further). On most occasions, this kind of effort, organized through land projects, is not concerned with the existing or resulting character of potentially quite complex social relations in the targeted spaces. Rather, these efforts are concerned with the quality of the associated legal documents (e.g. getting ‘clean’ papers) – this is literally the ‘thing’ that matters (Tsing 2002). Mainstream views of today’s (trans)national commercial land deals flow in the same current, seeking to avoid dealing with ‘messy’ land-based social relations and to focus only on more easily measured and managed ‘things’: clean land titles, clear property boundaries and so on.

Having clarified what we mean by land property relations, we now step back to take a look at broad patterns of changes in land property relations brought about by a range of land policies.

Broad Patterns in the Nature and Direction of Land Property Relations Change

Figure 2 offers a broad typology on the flow of change in land property; namely, redistribution, distribution, non-(re)distribution and (re)concentration.

The defining principle of Type A is *redistribution* of land-based wealth and power from the monopoly control of either private landed classes or the state to landless and near-landless working poor (poor peasants and rural labourers). It is a ‘zero-sum’ reform process, although redistribution is a matter of degree, depending on the net loss of classes of landed property and the net gain of the landless and near-landless poor. The conventional notion of redistributive land reform applied only to large private lands is the most commonly understood example of redistributive land reform. However, there are a variety of other policy measures that can change the relative shares of land held by social classes and groups. These include land restitution, share tenancy, land tenure reform, land stewardship, indigenous land rights recognition and labour reform, regardless of whether the policy is applied to private or public land. The key is to establish the degree to which land-based wealth and power is redistributed.

Figure 2 The flow of land-based wealth and power

Type A Redistribution	Type B Distribution
Type C Non-(re)distribution	Type D (Re)concentration

Type B is *distribution*. Like Type A (redistribution), the landless and near-landless working poor are beneficiaries of land-based wealth and power transferred to them. But in Type B, the original source of wealth and power is either the state or the community, or a private entity fully compensated by the state. This ‘positive sum’ reform process does not confiscate resources from one social class to redistribute to another, and has been deployed in some cases precisely to avoid more radical redistributive policies (Fox 1993, 10). However, in other cases, this type of reform involves affirming and protecting pre-existing land access and occupancy by poor peasants whose tenure is insecure, as in many countries in Africa (Cousins 2007). Take, for example, a piece of land officially categorized as public or state forest, but that is actually agro-forest land, tended and tilled by poor peasants or forest dwellers. If long-term use rights for forest land are allocated to make access more formal and secure for poor peasants or forest dwellers, then this is a distributive reform (Borras 2007; Franco 2009).

Type C is *non-(re)distribution*, whose defining character is the maintenance of a status quo, marked by land-based inequity and exclusion. The most typical land policy here is ‘no land policy’ which, in conditions of land-based inequities and exclusion, supports the existing distribution of land-based wealth and power. In other settings, a similar effect may be created when an existing land policy, even a redistributive land-reform policy, is kept dormant ‘from above’ or becomes frozen or flounders in the course of implementation as it comes up against impediments within the state or in society, or both. However, this kind of situation should not be confused with others involving active land policies that are categorically non-(re)distributive, to which we turn next.

The fourth type, Type D, is *(re)concentration*. The defining character here is that while land-based wealth and power transfers do occur, access to and control over land is further concentrated in the hands of dominant social classes and groups: landed classes, capitalists, corporate entities, state or other dominant community groups such as village chiefs. This kind of change can occur on private or public lands. The organization of control over land resources can be through individual, corporate, state or community property rights. The transfer may involve full land ownership or not. Different variations are possible, but the bottom line is the same: the beneficiaries of such transfers are dominant social classes and groups as well as state officials and bureaucrats.

Further Discussion on the Politics of Changes in Land Property Relations

Any analysis of current land grab-induced changes in property relations should be located in the bigger picture of agrarian change dynamics: not all displacement/dispossession today is a result of land grabbing, and not all land grabbing results in displacement and dispossession. In addition, and on the land policy front over the past few decades, there has been momentum among (inter)national governmental institutions away from Types A and B (re/distributive), in favour of Types C and D (non-redistribution and re/concentration) land policies – a trend that began well before the current cycle of land grabbing (Borras and Franco 2010b). This is an important context within which current land grabbing occurs, and it requires analysis. Thus we propose some additional preliminary insights in the hope of provoking deeper discussion of relevant issues.

First, the current global land grab occurs in diverse settings involving distinct institutional arrangements: some on lands that have been sites of earlier (re)distributive land policies (Types A and B land), others on lands that have not seen any prior redistribution, or were even outcomes of policies of land (re)concentration (Types C and D). The sequencing is also not uniform across societies. Some land deals resulted in subsequent changes in land property

relations (our examples of Mozambique and Cambodia), while others were facilitated by particular patterns of change in pre-existing land property relations (including land-reform settlements in Brazil and the Philippines). Given such complexity, it is not helpful to simply assume *a priori* that all contemporary land deals result in dispossession; empirical evidence does not support this assumption (at least not to date; it is possible that it may become more common later).

Second, as mentioned earlier, there is urgent concern about the actual or potential dispossession or displacement caused by enclosures carried out in the name of addressing the convergence of multiple global crises. But the character and extent of such dispossession or displacement should not be taken for granted, and requires careful empirical investigation to move analysis beyond the current, largely anecdotal and speculative discourse. Following the above discussion, we can see in a preliminary way that there is indeed a threat of land dispossession of peasants as a result of current (trans)national commercial land transactions. Yet in many land-abundant settings, as in most countries in Africa, perhaps the more common consequences seen to date have been peasants' 'displacement' or 'dislocation', rather than complete land dispossession. For example, most of the people who were supposed to be flushed out of the 30,000-hectare Procana sugarcane plantation in Mozambique were relocated to nearby land (Borras et al. 2011). The net impact, of course, might be just as worrying, especially when the 'rural poor' are relocated to less productive, environmentally more fragile land, or are forced into complex livelihood arrangements on their own land that may have been leased to companies or designated for contract farming schemes. It is even more problematic in the Procana case, as livestock herders' settlements were to be relocated, their traditional grazing areas rerouted, and boundaries redrawn and (re)fixed. Changes in the agrarian structure due to recent large-scale land transactions (and subsequent dispossession, dislocation and displacement) may already have resulted, and certainly will result, in complex changes in land property relations. This should be the subject of urgent and systematic scientific enquiry.

Third, not all land grabbing requires the expulsion of the 'rural poor' from their land. In cases where capitalism does need both land and labour, it is in the interest of capital to retain peasants on their land via contractualized relationships, either as lessor-labourers or as contract growers. For example, many small farmers in Indonesia or in São Paulo in Brazil are linked to emerging plantation enclaves through contract farming and/or land lease-and-labour arrangements. This also appears to be the situation emerging in the case of the new biofuel project in Isabela province in the Philippines. The effect is salutary for capitalist investors: they are able to control land while avoiding dispossessing smallholders. But how is it for the smallholders who enter into such arrangements? Do such arrangements always and necessarily imply what Du Toit (2004) calls 'adverse incorporation'? Whether or not smallholders will be incorporated adversely depends on multiple factors that go deeper than the quality of the deal-making process, including (among others): the nature of the capital invested, the political-legal character of the state, and the relative power and strategies of peasant associations and farm-worker unions. In the context of current land grabbing, bringing these factors under the spotlight allows more nuanced research and discussion of livelihood disruption, relocation and compensation, incorporation in land deal enclaves, and labour conditions, which are pressing and profound issues for so many affected people.

Fourth, the typology helps us situate our view of contemporary agrarian struggles. In the context of global land grab, contemporary land struggles are generally understood and assumed to be *struggles against dispossession*. In this paper, we understand the latter as the struggles of the 'rural poor', with varying degrees of access to and control over land, who are being evicted or threatened by eviction and dispossession. Both in theory and practice,

this type of struggle is captured in the '(re)concentration' and 'non-redistribution' types (C and D). However, *struggles for land (re)possession* can be equally important, and are captured in the 'redistribution' and 'distribution' types (A and B). Here, by 'struggles for (re)possession' we mean struggles by the 'rural poor', who are generally landless/propertyless, to get some kind of access to, control over or ownership of land in a variety of institutional arrangements (land reform, land restitution, lease and so on). There are current examples from Brazil, Philippines, South Africa and Zimbabwe, to name a few. What we see are *simultaneous struggles* against dispossession and for land (re)possession – on both the private and non-private land property fronts, whether these are organized and structured forms of contention, such as those by social movements (Brazil and Indonesia today), or less organized and structured 'everyday forms of resistance', as in many parts of Asia (see Kerkvliet 1993; Kerkvliet 2005; O'Brien 1996; Franco 2008).

Fifth, an important implication of the above framing is that contemporary land issues and struggles have put land reform back at the centre of development and political discourse, but with a narrow sense of land reform conceptually, both policy-wise and politically. Land reform can certainly address issues and struggles in Type A and B settings (struggles for land (re)possession), but it does not easily fit as a concept, a policy and a political demand in 'struggles against dispossession' in Type C and D settings (non-redistribution and (re)concentration).

Sixth, the most common, catch-all recommendation that 'local people should have land tenure security' in the midst of the global land grab – typically through some kind of 'formal' land tenure instrument, whether community land rights, individual private property rights and so on – has important limitations. If we follow its logic, it would mean that global land grabbing can be prevented, or at least its negative impact can be mitigated, if some forms of land tenure security (i.e. individual private property rights, or community land rights and so on) are in place. But we can point to numerous examples to the contrary: land-reform beneficiaries in Brazil directly affected by the waves of rapid expansion of sugarcane ethanol production in the state of São Paulo; smallholders with formal community land rights in Mozambique, evicted due to a massive land clearance to establish a sugarcane ethanol plantation; or land-reform beneficiaries in West Bengal and Kerala who recently lost their lands to commercial-industrial interests. In the Philippines, what the government originally promised for export food and biofuel production for China were lands held by land-reform beneficiaries. Hence, this casual formulation that 'local people should have land tenure security' is, at best, very weak. Its worst variant, of course, is the conscious neoliberal advocacy of privatizing public lands for a more 'efficient' reallocation of access to, control over or ownership of land through 'market-led agrarian reforms', lifting land size ceilings, liberalizing land rental and sales markets and undermining their regulatory institutions, and so on.

Seventh, if and when implemented, any 'code of conduct' (including 'responsible agricultural investments' or RAI principles) between the global land grab drivers and promoters (TNCs, foreign companies, national governments) is most likely to facilitate and expedite non-redistribution and (re)concentration processes (C and D), and to discourage or even block reformist (re)redistributive ones (A and B). The code-of-conduct framework is essentially anchored on the concept of 'land governance': the efficient administration and management of land and land markets: transparent, clearer, cheaper and faster. It serves the interest of (neoliberal) states and its logic of state-building (e.g. an expanded tax base, less public expense) and provides 'land tenure security' primarily to investors. Any ostensible space for negotiation between the rural poor and the land deals drivers and promoters will be marked by power imbalances that are heavily in favour of the latter. Not even a progressive land law that requires community participation can guarantee the right of the 'rural poor' against displacement or

dispossession, as shown in the case of Procana. Locating negotiation at the local level, as decentralized and community-negotiated – as advocated by the World Bank – aggravates the problem, because in most agrarian settings ‘local communities’ are where the political and economic power of dominant classes and groups is most entrenched, while the influence of progressive and radical allies of the rural poor is often most weak. Again, this is demonstrated in the cases of the Procana plantation in Gaza province of Mozambique, the Ecofuel project in Isabela province in the Philippines and the Kampong Speu Sugar land concession in Cambodia, among others. The manipulation by dominant classes and groups, including local government officials, of market-led agrarian reform programmes worldwide is illustrative of what is likely to happen in such situations.

Finally, bilateral and multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the FAO, IFAD, GTZ and others are joining the chorus today in criticizing land grabbing (albeit avoiding the term ‘land grab’ and preferring ‘large-scale land investments’) by TNCs and foreign governments that displaces people from their lands, completely dispossesses ‘rural people’ and/or undermines the food security of communities. Yet, it is important to point out a contradiction among these agencies: that their recent advocacy [see Bergeret (2008) on EU land policy, Craeynest (2008) on the UK’s DfID, Vanreusel (2009) on Belgian aid, Herre (2009) on German aid and Monsalve (2008) on FAO land policy] of privatization/formalization of land rights worldwide – through land titling and market-led agrarian reform to establish private property in land as collateral to attract investors – facilitates the same large-scale land transactions that, they say, now concern them. Moreover, some of these international development institutions may also have some potentially progressive land policies to prevent massive enclosures but do not implement them – see, for example, the European Union 2004 land policy guidelines (Borras and Franco 2011).

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Focusing our analysis of changes in land property relations on the direction of transfers of effective control over land-based wealth and power enables us to analytically trace the dynamics of political processes in the midst of a maze of land policies. The four broad patterns of changes in land property relations more generally can provide wider lenses for us to be able to examine the implications of the contemporary (trans)national commercial land deals. Current debates tend to focus on issues of ‘form’ – not substance (i.e. dynamics of social relations) – emphasizing questions such as ‘Should it be a lease for 99 or 25 years?’, ‘Yes to land deals as long as there is no dispossession?’, ‘Should it be direct plantation control by TNCs or contract farming with small farmers?’ ‘Should people have prior formal individual private land property rights or community rights?’ The key is to establish the principles of what we mean by *rural poor people’s effective control* over land resources, regardless of the form of formal property rights, focusing on the ‘bundle of powers’ and not just on the ‘bundle of rights’, as argued by Ribot and Peluso (2003).

Taking this discussion a step further, we can also begin to think about how these two dimensions might be linked, and make some very preliminary suggestions that require considerably more work to follow up. We propose linking changing social relations of property in land with changing land (and crop) use that directly bear on capacities to ‘feed the world’ (i.e. to address the production–food access/security connection) and to respond to climate change. These are two distinct but interlinked dimensions of the agro-ecological challenges facing humanity today. And they are likewise the urgent concerns of two broadly distinct and traditionally separate – but now increasingly interactive – transnational social movements; namely, the agrarian justice and environmental justice movements.

The challenges of linking the analysis of these two dimensions are themselves multifaceted. For example, hypothetically, what if we have a situation that scores ‘high’ in the first typology – namely, land-use change that does not harm the biophysical environment and even nurtures it, and produces more food (B2b, C1, C3, D1 and D3 in Table 1) – but that scores ‘low’ in the second typology – namely, changes in land property relations that undermine the interests of the ‘rural poor’ (Types C and D in Figure 2)? Rich peasant- or landlord-driven agrarian change can unfold along this line. Conversely, what if we have a situation that scores ‘low’ in the first typology – namely, land-use change that does not produce more food and harms the biophysical environment (A2, B1, C2, C4, D2 and D4), such as forest land or land for food production for consumption and domestic exchange converted to food and biofuel production *for export* – but then scores ‘high’ in the second typology (Types A and B)? There are many different possible combinations that expose important actual and potential fault lines: between agrarian justice and environmental justice concerns, between social classes and groups, and so on.

To elaborate further, Table 2 provides broad ideal-typical combinations in terms of possible intersections between changes in land-use and land property relations within the broader context of multiple global crises of food, energy and climate change, and responses to them. The last two categories in each combination are simplified phrases to mean, respectively: (a) the capacity to produce enough food and at the same time address the issue of democratic access/food security for all; and (b) the capacity to utilize natural resources (land, water) to produce food and fuel, but in ways that do not undermine the biophysical environment in the long run.

The worst possible scenario – and the most protested change in land-use or land property relations, either real, imagined or predicted – is scenario H: the direction of change in land property relations is away from the ‘rural poor’, while land-use change results in incapacity to feed the world (production and/or food access) and undermines the biophysical environment. (e.g. ‘mining the soil’, clearing forests).

At the opposite pole is ideal-type A of ‘what ought to be’: the direction and terms of change in land property relations change in favour of the rural poor, while land-use change builds capacity to feed the world and nurture the biophysical environment. This ideal type is the strategic goal of combined agrarian and environmental justice movements that have gained ground worldwide during the past couple of decades: a more or less integrated ‘food–energy–land sovereignty’ strategic alternative (both as a broad idea and as local initiatives) has widespread purchase among civil society activists and their allies in the academic world (Holt-Gimenez and

Table 2. Possible linkages between changes in land property relations and land use

<i>Changes in land property relations</i>	<i>Changes in land use (i): Food securing</i>	<i>Changes in land use (ii): Ecologically nurturing</i>
A: (re)distributive	Yes	Yes
B: (re)distributive	Yes	No
C: (re)distributive	No	Yes
D: (re)distributive	No	No
E: nonredistributive/(re)concentration	Yes	Yes
F: nonredistributive/(re)concentration	Yes	No
G: nonredistributive/(re)concentration	No	Yes
H: nonredistributive/(re)concentration	No	No

Source: Borrás and Franco (forthcoming, 2012).

Shattuck 2011; Patel 2009). Agro-ecology and agro-ecological movements are thought by some to be the key vehicles for attaining ideal-type A (Altieri and Toledo 2011; Rosset et al. 2011).

Between Types A and H are a range of other ideal-types that point to an even more immense range of actually existing combinations of land-use and property relations arrangements. Some of them are promising, if only partially, such as many small farms created by land reforms that are highly productive but adopt conventional fossil fuel-based farming techniques. Some scenarios pose difficult dilemmas, such as some possible variants of Type D.

In short, changes in land use and property relations are distinct but interlinked areas of agrarian change and of its critical investigation. Ideal-types A and H serve as markers of best-case and worst-case scenarios, and in that sense are no doubt least contentious. More contentious are various combinations outside the polar 'positive' and 'negative' ideal-types that correspond to most cases in the real world. They present multiple fault lines partly defined along divisions of class, gender and ethnicity; between rural and urban, agriculture and industrial sectors, as well as agrarian and environmental justice perspectives. This points to matters of critical enquiry and debate that require more focused attention in the rapidly growing literature on global land grabbing.

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