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Annelies Zoomers

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Globalisation and the foreignisation of space: seven processes driving the current global land grab

Annelies Zoomers

The current global land grab is causing radical changes in the use and ownership of land. The main process driving the land grab, or 'foreignisation of space', as highlighted in the media and the emerging literature is the production of food and biofuel for export in the aftermath of recent food and energy crises. However, there are several other processes driving the land rush. In this article I argue that an analytical framework that focuses on only one or two processes that drive the global land grab offers a narrow perspective on this complex process. It will be unable to take into account the full range and extent of agrarian and social changes that occur in light of the land grab and their strategic implications for poor people's livelihoods. An important starting point is to identify the broad processes driving the current land rush, and trace their structural and institutional origins. To do so, I identify and examine seven factors that are giving rise to radical changes in landownership and land use in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Finally, 'codes of conduct' as proposed by several quarters in the context of global land grab are unlikely to work in favour of the poor.

Keywords: globalisation; land grab; local development; enclosure; displacement; migration

Introduction

The contemporary global land grab has recently become a key development issue. The term 'land grab' generally refers to large-scale, cross-border land deals or transactions that are carried out by transnational corporations or initiated by foreign governments. They concern the lease (often for 30–99 years), concession or outright purchase of large areas of land in other countries for various purposes (GRAIN 2008). The main process driving the current global land grab that is highlighted in the media and the emerging literature is the production of food for export to finance-rich, resource-poor countries in the aftermath of the food crisis of 2007–2008. This is correct, and is indeed quite dramatic.

However, there are several other equally important processes driving the current global land grab. In this paper I argue that an analytical framework that focuses on only one or two processes that drive the global land grab offers a narrow perspective on this far-reaching and complex process. It will be unable to take into account the full range and extent of agrarian and social changes that occur in light of the global land grab and their strategic implications to poor people's livelihoods. An important starting point is to identify the broad processes driving the current land rush and

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trace their structural and institutional origins. To do so, I identify and examine seven factors that are giving rise to radical changes in landownership and land use in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Our understanding of the global land grab can be deepened and expanded by using broader analytical lenses. Rather than focusing on in situ processes of land grabbing, it is important to look at what I call the 'foreignisation' of space or land.

Globalisation, market liberalisation and the rapid increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) are increasingly accompanied by land grabbing and a real estate boom. Local people are often forced to either endure enclosure or move to more isolated, marginal locations. Rather than looking at short-term and spatially specific implications of land grabbing, we should focus on the foreignisation of space in relation to its implications for sustainable and equitable development. Many land deals around food for export, biofuels and minerals are taking place in Africa, and much emphasis is put on the need to make these deals more transparent and participative. Depending on the types of investments and the behaviour of the investors, these large-scale land deals could contribute to poverty alleviation. Codes of conduct are developed to ensure that investors adhere to a number of key principles; for example, they should respect existing land and resource rights, guarantee food security and ensure transparency (Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, Cotula *et al*. 2009). I argue that processes of land grabbing are broader and deeper than assumed, and codes of conduct or contractual arrangements will neither help to stop nor turn the tide.

Finally, this article is a preliminary mapping paper. It is a scoping exercise aimed at developing a more extensive and more helpful analytical lens – rather than a comprehensive empirical study. The intention is to stimulate more rigorous and critical discussions on how to carry out systematic research inquiries into the phenomenon of the global land grab.

The global land grab: painting the background

The current land grab is partly a result of a combination of globalisation, the liberalisation of land markets and the worldwide boom in FDI. In a globalising world, local development is increasingly played out in a matrix of links that enable connections to be made between people and places on a world scale. The intensification of worldwide social relations links distant localities such that local happenings are shaped by events that occur many miles away and vice versa (Giddens 1990, 64, also Harvey 1989). According to Appadurai (1996, 192), globalisation creates landscapes of translocalities:

> Such localities create complex conditions for the production and reproduction of locality in which ties of marriage, work, business and leisure weave together various circulating populations, with kinds of locals to create neighbourhoods that belong in one sense to particular nation states, but are from another point of view what might be called translocalities.

Globalisation has made the world flatter (Friedman 2006, 11) and made it possible to cover large distances very quickly. The population is becoming dispersed across the world, but is able to maintain intensive, cross-border contacts through social and political networks (Portes 1995, 1996, Jackson *et al*. 2004, Lucas 2004, Vertovec 1999, Sheffer 2003, Zoomers 2006). People move while maintaining contacts with groups in different countries, and new communications and transport technology has made it possible to communicate and to travel more rapidly, and to own land and houses in distant, exotic destinations.

The global land grab is to a large extent the result of the liberalisation of land markets, which became a major policy goal in the course of the 1990s and has contributed to the commoditisation of land and other natural resources (Brenner and Theodore 2007). Along with the spread of the neoliberal model, and with the support of donors, many governments in Asia, Latin America and Africa started to give more priority to creating dynamic, free and transparent land markets (Deininger 2003, Zoomers and van der Haar 2000).

During earlier land reforms (i.e. in the period of the 1950s–1970s), non-productively used estates had been expropriated for redistribution among the peasantry ('land for those who work it') and limits were imposed on individual landownership. The beneficiaries were generally not entitled to sell the land – a measure that was designed to protect them from losing it (de Janvry *et al.* 1998, Thiesenhusen 1995, 162, Dorner 1992, Kay 1998).[1] The absence of clearly defined plots and registered titles was increasingly seen as a significant obstacle to economic growth, as it was thought to limit the readiness of people to make the investments needed to modernise agriculture. The landholdings of beneficiaries of the earlier land reforms, which previously could not be sold or used as collateral, were transformed into private, freehold property.

The conversion of collective and customary land rights into formal, individual rights and the creation of free land markets were expected to lead to greater efficiency and more investment (De Soto 2000). Smallholders would be able to use their land as collateral and thus gain access to credit, enabling them to enter into joint ventures with capital suppliers. Security of tenure would stimulate long-term investment, while individual property rights would lead to greater efficiency (Deininger 2003). Farmers who no longer set great store on their rights could sell or lease out their land, and thus contribute to the redistribution of land to more efficient producers.

Even though donors have long regarded interventions in land issues as politically oversensitive (see Zoomers and van der Haar 2000), in the 1990s the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization (United Nations) (FAO), the EU and bilateral donors became actively involved both conceptually (e.g. Deininger 2003, EU 2004) and in funding initiatives related to land policy, legislation and implementation. Since the 1990s, large sums have been spent on the granting of property titles and the setting up of modern land registries, with the principal aim of creating dynamic, free and transparent land markets (Deininger 2003, Zoomers and van der Haar 2000).

In the same period, a number of Latin American and some Asian countries started to pay more attention to the protection of collective indigenous rights

[1]In Asia, Africa and Latin America, skewed landownership relationships and the informality of rights were long regarded as contributing to rural underdevelopment. In the 1950s–1980s, government interventions in the form of land reforms and/or agricultural colonisation often did not resolve the issue of access to land for the poor (Dorner 1992, 33). Many attempts at land reform did not succeed in reducing insecurity and the inequality of rights. In most countries, land reforms were 'too small, too late, too under-funded, too dictated from above, too hierarchically organized' and did not meet the needs and demands of the grass roots (Thiesenhusen 1989, 488). Agricultural colonisation, although contributing to economic growth through the expansion of the agricultural area, has been responsible for rapid deforestation, an increase in land conflicts and new forms of rural poverty.

(Roldan 1996, in Assies 2000, 98).[2] In addition, because of the increased focus on sustainability and the environment, investments were made in nature reserves (Kyle and Cunha 1992, Schabel 1997, Richards 1996). Further, UNESCO compiled a list of World Heritage sites, which are to be protected for their architectural or archaeological value, natural beauty, biodiversity and/or wildlife (World Heritage Centre 2001). Despite these commendable aims, such initiatives have often done little to alleviate the plight of the poor, as they often further reduced the poor's access to vital natural resources.

Although in many regions there has been some success with titling and registration (Deininger 2003, 47, Li *et al.* 1998), it also brought a number of limitations to light. These programmes turned out to be not very effective or efficient, particularly in Africa. While titling was expected to promote long term investments and ensure the transfer of land from less efficient to more efficient users, studies assessing the impact of tenure reform in Africa often found few significant effects of privatisation on production and, in some cases, even negative effects (Bruce and Migot Adholla 1994). The impacts of privatisation of pastoral rangelands on production have been particularly contentious (Rutten 1992, Peters 1994, Pinckney and Kimuyu 1994, Archambault 2007).

In marginal areas the costs of measuring and registering land are often out of all proportion to the paltry incomes earned by small farmers, and banks do not view such farmers as creditworthy, even if they hold property titles. Many programmes had negative distributive effects: people with good connections, information and resources were able to register land in their names, at the expense of others. Moreover, registration tends to focus on the (male) household head, while those with derived, secondary rights (i.e. mostly women) lost out, and it was difficult to keep the resulting land information systems up to date. In fact, informal customary law is in many cases more satisfactory than 'modern', individual rights recorded in land registries and need not hamper investment (see e.g. Nyamu-Musembi 2007, Sjaastad and Cousins 2008, Cousins 2009, Assies 2009, Ubink *et al.* 2009).

Over the last decades, there has been some shift away from promoting 'full-fledged private freehold property' in favour of a more open and broader approach of tenure security and land governance (Borras and Franco 2010). There is acceptance that customary tenure institutions may provide sufficient security for investments and reduce conflict, and may also benefit from careful formalisation and legal backup (EU 2004, Ubink 2009). There is also much more space to protect the rights of indigenous groups, address issues of gender equality, and value the environmental, cultural and/or social role of land (see the EU policy guidelines). It is now recognised that tenure security does not necessarily require individual land ownership but can be provided by community-based rights systems (see Deininger 2003). There are new initiatives to secure cultivated lands by means of such instruments as registration and certification. Simple, low-cost and accessible forms of

[2]The signing of ILO Convention 169 (1989) provided a basis for the granting of territorial rights to indigenous groups. 'This convention, which has been given the status of national law in many countries, facilitated the protection of the total environment of the areas which the peoples occupy or otherwise use' (Art. 13–2); this concerned 'safeguarding the rights of the peoples concerned to use lands not exclusively occupied by them but to which they have traditionally had access for their subsistence and traditional activities' (Art. 14–1).

land records are now being introduced in, for example, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Niger, Benin and Mozambique, as well as in Latin America and Asia (Ubink *et al.* 2009).

The liberalisation of land markets went hand in hand with rapid increases in FDI, which often gave rise to new types of actors in the control and use of land. According to the World Bank Investment Report (United Nations 2007, xv), 2006 saw the largest investment ever in developing countries: USD 379 million (a 21 percent increase over 2005). In 2007, this figure rose to USD 500 billion, 13 billion of which was invested in the very poorest countries (United Nations 2008, 1). Although the investments were made in various sectors, most went into the exploitation of minerals (including oil and gas), the production of biofuels and food, and the development of infrastructure and services, including tourism (2008, 1). Although there is now free trade between an increasing number of countries, the credit crisis makes it impossible to predict the consequences of this (2008, 8).

Governments in developing countries are trying in the context of good governance to create a transparent entrepreneurial climate. Foreign investors are pampered, because the attraction of foreign capital is a necessary condition for economic growth. As a consequence, foreign investors can fairly easily become the owners of houses, land and forests, especially now that the land markets are accessible. There has been a real estate boom in many countries, where not only American and European investors but also investors from the Gulf States are taking advantage of attractive legislation.[3] Besides tax concessions, the repatriation of capital is guaranteed and very attractive compensation is offered in the event of expropriation. Embassies often play an important role in supporting investors: they not only encourage potential investors, but also point out the risks and pitfalls. In addition, a large number of specialised firms assist potential investors to purchase land, and many governments organise excursions to their countries or offer special guided tours that enable people to 'test the water' without obligation.[4]

The growing demand for land is met partly by the sale of state land and the granting of concessions by governments, and partly by sales by private individuals, including rural dwellers. Many of the latter have recently turned their backs on agriculture and want to profit from the rising prices.

The seven processes contributing to the foreignisation of space

Globalisation, the liberalisation of land markets and a massive increase in FDI have generated a new type of land grab, one in which not only private investors but also

[3]Lebanon is an example of a country that is undergoing a real estate boom: 'In 2007, close to 4.3 billion dollars worth of properties were sold, mostly to Saudi, Kuwaiti and Emirati nationals. These transactions, according to the brokers, pushed the price of property in the capital up by more than 30 per cent' (*Daily Star*, 15 October 2008).

It is interesting that remittances are also important in Lebanon, where they account for more than a quarter of GNP.

[4]See e.g. Wold (1998). There are also books on the market to assist future investors (e.g. Carballo 1993). Private companies are also active in obtaining land rights and in looking for land.

national and local governments are playing an increasingly important role. As stated, investments are being made in the production of biofuels and food, and in the development of infrastructure and services, including tourism (United Nations 2007, xv). More and more investors and business groups are becoming the legal owners or lessees of large tracts of land.

In the following I deal with the seven processes that are giving rise to radical changes in landownership and land use, and that are consequently putting local land markets under pressure. I do not pay attention to the more traditional types of foreign investment – namely those related to mining and/or the traditional land purchases for cattle farming and agribusiness (traditional export crops) – but focus on those processes that are relatively new and are resulting in the foreignisation of land.

Offshore farming: FDI in food production

Much of the current land grab is a result of the increasing demand for cheap food crops. Food supply problems and uncertainties are created by constraints on agricultural production related to the limited availability of water and arable land, by bottlenecks in storage and distribution, and by the expansion of biofuel production, which is an important competing land and crop use. Increasing urbanisation rates and changing diets are also pushing up global food demands. The food price hikes of 2007 and 2008 shook the assumption that the world will continue to enjoy low food prices. While other food prices have dropped from the highs seen in the summer of 2008, some of the structural factors underpinning rising prices are likely to remain (Cotula *et al.* 2009, 5).

'Food-insecure' governments that rely on imports to feed their populations (e.g. the Gulf States) are seeking to outsource their domestic food production by buying and/or leasing vast areas of farmland abroad for their own offshore food production. They see this as an innovative, long-term strategy to feed their populations at a good price and with greater security than hitherto. The list of food-security land grabbers is a long one. The biggest players are China and the Gulf States, while countries such as Saudi Arabia, Japan, Malaysia, India, South Korea, Libya and Egypt are hunting for fertile farmland in places like Uganda, Madagascar, Mali, Somalia, Sudan and Mozambique, as well as in the Philippines, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Pakistan, Burma, Brazil, Argentina, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, etc. (GRAIN 2008, Cotula *et al.* 2009, Taylor and Bending 2009).

The governments of 'host' countries generally welcome foreign investment, even though much of their own population in countries like Madagascar, Sudan and Cambodia lack food. Large-scale land acquisition for food security by richer countries in poorer countries is increasingly contested, because it is not considered ethical to export food from countries in which there is hunger. There has been extensive media coverage of, for example, the 1.3 million ha deal between the South Korean company Daewoo Logistics and the government of Madagascar. The deal was reported to involve the acquisition of land in the west and east of the country in order to grow maize and palm oil mainly for export to South Korea. However, the deal ran into trouble and was then scuppered by the new government of Madagascar (Cotula *et al.* 2009, 37). According to the plans, the land would have been prepared for cultivation by South African labourers (Blas 2008).

State-owned firms from Qatar, Dubai and other Gulf States are reported to be involved in the formation of a joint holding company to produce food in Sudan and other countries for export to Arab markets. A consortium of Saudi agricultural firms recently announced plans to invest USD 400 million in food production in Sudan and Ethiopia, following investment in 10,000 ha of barley, wheat and livestock in Egypt. Other investors are looking for land in Angola, Mali and Malawi. Finally, Abu Dhabi plans to acquire 400,000 ha in Africa and Asia, with the aim of limiting food imports from other countries (Cotula *et al.* 2008, Cotula *et al.* 2009, GRAIN 2008).

FDI in non-food agricultural commodities and biofuels

A second driver behind the current land grab is the global demand for biofuels and non-food agricultural commodities, combined with expectations of rising rates of return in agriculture and of rising land values (Cotula *et al.* 2009, 5, 100). Hungry for profits in the midst of the financial crisis, both financial corporations and private investors see investment in foreign farmland as an important new source of revenue. The food and financial crises have turned agricultural land into a strategic asset that is seen as a new source of profit. Foreign private corporations are increasingly gaining control of farmland, which in many cases threatens small-scale farming and rural livelihoods (GRAIN 2008, Cotula *et al.* 2009).

With regard to biofuels, government consumption targets (e.g. in the EU) and financial incentives are a key driving force. Given the diminishing supplies of non-renewables, biofuels are likely to remain an option in the longer term. Private investors who are interested in benefiting from the biofuel boom are actively looking for land in Argentina, Brazil, Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mali and Tanzania (Sulle and Nelson 2009), and in various other African countries. Examples of biofuel crops that have rapidly expanded in recent years are jatropha (especially in the drier regions), soya (which already covers over 16 million ha in Argentina, and is also important in Paraguay), sugar cane (large areas in Brazil and in Tanzania) and the oil palm (particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia,[5] but also in Colombia). In West Kalimantan the area devoted to oil palms has grown since the 1990s from 500,000 ha to over 3.2 million ha, and this has led to a sharp increase in the number of land conflicts in Indonesia. Foreign companies also want to invest in land for reafforestation projects within the context of the Clean Development Mechanism.

Little is known about the exact extent of land acquisition for biofuel production. However, according to Cotula and colleagues (2009) – who made an inventory of agricultural investment in Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mali and Sudan – there is a rapid increase in land-based foreign investments (for both food and biofuels), although domestic investors are also playing a major role in land acquisitions. Since 2004, foreign investors have taken control of 2,492,684 ha, a figure that excludes parcels of less than 1000 ha. Foreign investors (supported by governments) are controlling increasingly large areas of farmland, which they use for agribusiness

[5]In Kalimantan increasing conflicts are arising around the rapidly expanding oil palm plantations: 'The number of communities involved in conflicts has mushroomed to more than 50 since 2005 in West Kalimantan, and to about 400 for the whole of Indonesia. The concessions given to companies just in West Kalimantan have risen from about 500,000 ha in the 1990s to more than 3.2 million ha now – about six times the size of the tourist island of Bali' (Painter 2007).

development (the large-scale production of wheat, rice, soya beans and maize) and biofuel crops, most of which are destined for export markets. GRAIN estimates that USD 100 billion have already been mobilised to pay for these deals, which involved more than 50 countries that were targeted by about 1000 investment groups and 12 governments (GRAIN 2008). Lease contracts are often for 30–99 years, and most of these allocations have put pressure on higher-value lands (i.e. those with irrigation potential or that are closer to market). When approached with land deal proposals, many African governments readily accept them, partly because they need FDI and want to promote rural development – even though smallholders are usually not involved in the deals and local communities are at risk of losing their access to land.

Development of protected areas, nature reserves, ecotourism and hideaways

Private individuals and international organisations have become actively engaged in the purchase of large areas of land in 'empty' regions for nature conservation or ecotourism purposes (or a combination of the two). This, combined with the official nature reserves and, on some occasions, territories for indigenous groups instituted by governments, is putting increasing pressure on local land markets.[6] In large parts of Asia (e.g. Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia) and Latin America (Brazil, Costa Rica, etc.) increasing flows of private investment are mobilised in the direction of 'empty' forest areas, not only for the expansion of biofuel production (see above), but also for projects being carried out in the name of 'biodiversity protection and reforestation', such as REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). In Africa, in countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Namibia, Zambia, etc., the private sector is playing an expanding role in wildlife production and commercial 'conservation', often developed in close relation to tourism promotion (Archambault 2007, Brandt *et al.* 2009). Keeping private nature reserves can increasingly be seen as lucrative business and productive land is converted into newly created 'wilderness' landscapes.

A region that merits explicit mention in this connection is Patagonia in Argentina. In the last two decades many North American millionaires have succeeded in taking possession of huge swathes of land. In his book *Patagonia vendida* ('Patagonia sold'), Gonzalo Sánchez (2006) describes how this region was almost wholly bought up by Americans and Europeans.[7] The ease with which land could be purchased in the 1990s was partly the result of the fact that during his term, President Menem spared no effort to attract foreign investors. He referred to the empty Patagonia as 'land that was left over' (*la tierra que sobra*). Only 5 percent of the 37 million Argentinians lived in this region. There were few limitations on the purchase of land in Argentina: the absence of rules meant that everything was legal, even the purchase of national parks by private actors. The provincial governments often had free play. Between 1996 and 1998, the Secretaría de Seguridad Interior (SSI) granted permission for the sale of 8 million ha, and now virtually the whole of

[6]'By recruiting income to buy up tracts of land thought valuable for the preservation of biodiversity and rare habitats'. One may speak in a certain sense of a 'hegemony of highly individualistic and exclusive property rights over nature' (Heynen *et al.* 2007, 12).
[7]For example, an Argentinian who until 1990 owned a 'heavenly' piece of land in the Nahuel Huapi nature reserve relates how he could not resist the temptation to sell when an American turned up and offered him USD 15 million for it (Sánchez 2006).

Patagonia is privately owned, including natural resources such as oil, gas and water.[8] Because of the extent of the foreign investments, Patagonia can almost be regarded as a free state. Although the purchases are legal and some investors strive to achieve noble goals, there has been increasing resistance in Argentina since the publication of the book. However, the large-scale sale of land is not limited to Argentina: in neighbouring Uruguay, for example, more than 5 million ha have been sold to foreigners in just the last five years (Ford n.d.).

Also the private estate of the Moon sect in the Paraguayan Chaco constitutes a special case. In 2000, the 'firm' purchased 600,000 ha, which incidentally made 'Moon' the owner of the small town of Puerto Casado (population 6000), which was once an important centre for the exploitation of quebracho extract by a private Argentinian enterprise. Although it is not wholly clear what goes on there, this private estate appears to function as a hideaway: it is a definite no-go area for outsiders. However, under pressure from the Paraguayan Government (and in order to avoid expropriation), the Moon firm decided in 2005 to relinquish 30,000 ha to the inhabitants of Puerto Maldonado (*EFE News Service* 2005a, 2005b, Dürksen 2000).

SEZs, large-scale infrastructure works, urban extensions

The fourth process is related to the increasing shortage of space as a direct consequence of efforts to achieve economic growth. With the onset of globalisation and increased international investments, particularly Asian governments are freeing land for the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and their infrastructure, such as airfields and ring-roads.

In India, 303 SEZs covering a total area of 1400 square kilometres have already been created. Hyderabad is an example of a city that recently expropriated a lot of land on which to build Information and Communication Technology (ICT) parks and an airport. In 1998, it was decided to create a high-tech city in order to provide space for the rapidly growing ICT sector. Three years later, 'Cyberabad' – a zone covering 52 km^2 – arose. The number of ICT parks around Hyderabad grew from 5 in 2000 to nearly 70 in 2007; these have recently been supplemented by SEZs. This rapid development has led to the displacement of agriculture and a rapid rise in land prices (Ramachandraiah 2009).

Investment in SEZs is also taking place at a rapid tempo in other Asian countries. In Cambodia, for example, 59 'economic land concessions' (covering nearly 1 million ha) were recently designated. In many instances the local population is forced to move, and does not always receive compensation. Often only a small proportion of the local population is able to benefit from the newly created employment, as the majority are too poorly skilled.

At an increasing number of places, efforts towards economic growth and the attraction of foreign investments are accompanied by the forced displacement of the local population, under what is known as 'development-induced displacement'. The World Bank estimates that in 2000, some 10 million people were displaced in

[8]The Benetton family owns 1 million ha (currently in use as a sheep farm); Douglas Tompkins (the owner of North Face, Esprit and other concerns) owned 900,000 ha, which he decided to turn into a nature reserve and thus make a positive contribution to nature conservation. Other big names – such as Ted Turner (the founder of CNN) and the owner of Lay (potato crisps) – bought large areas of land to convert into golf courses or hunting grounds.

China, India, Thailand and Cambodia for the sake of economic growth (Cernea and McDowell 2000). An impressive example is the population displacement that took place in China to allow for the building of the Three Gorges Dam (Sullivan 2005):[9] it resulted in the forced migration of two million people. Increasing areas of land are also being allocated in the form of mining concessions (e.g. Mali, Honduras), which restricts the manoeuvring space of local people.

Governments will increasingly have to turn to commercial land markets (which is what they already do in many cases), and therefore 'development' will become increasingly expensive. Although there are now extensive compensation schemes, they are inadequate to allow the displaced population to buy land in other places. Thus, while land is sought for the creation of SEZs, it is also sought for those who need to be resettled. The greatest pressure at the moment is in peri-urban zones: scarcely any space is left for 'ordinary' urban expansion. Land prices are particularly under pressure in the vicinity of cities, also because better-off city dwellers want weekend residences that are 'in the country' but close to their cities. International migrants who use their remittances to purchase land prefer to do so in the neighbourhood of a city, as there is often nothing in which to invest in their villages of origin.

Large-scale tourist complexes

The fifth process comprises the rapidly growing investments in large-scale tourist complexes, partly thanks to the attractive investment arrangements in this field. International hotel chains (e.g. Marriott, Four Seasons, Hilton, Hyatt) are actively looking for new, attractive and strategic locations to build large-scale, all-inclusive resorts. Particularly places on the UNESCO World Heritage list or those featured in the Lonely Planet guides are seen by foreign investors as commercially attractive. For example, 80 percent of all the beaches in Costa Rica are now in the hands of foreign investors (Honey 1999), while in Bolivia even an archaeological site (one containing the footprints of mammoths) is now privately owned. Here, too, it is difficult to obtain a picture of the spatial extent of the process, but the local impact is often strong. In many instances an 'enclave economy' arises, with major consequences not only for employment and migration, but also for the use of natural resources.

Many developing countries now encourage investments in tourism, because it is believed that tourism offers possibilities for rapid economic growth. The Cape Verde islands are a good example. The economy has been increasingly liberalised since the mid 1990s and, partly as a consequence of large investments in the tourist industry, Cape Verde has risen on the Human Development Index from a 'poor' to a 'middle-income' country. In discussions about good governance, the islands are seen as a shining example of what is possible in other countries: the country's political stability and stimulating entrepreneurial climate have contributed to an increase of the per capita income to USD 1500 a month.[10] At the local level, however, the situation is

[9]In order to respond to China's growing need for fresh water, electricity power and flood control; this meant the need to resettle almost two million people. It was like a war between the Chinese state and local society (Sullivan 2005).

[10]'Cape Verde, which has a per capita income of around USD 1500, is considered an example in Africa in terms of human development: it has achieved a steady rate of development, thanks to good governance and a maturing democracy' (de Queiros 2008).

somewhat different. The island of Boa Vista, for example, is populated increasingly by Italians – who are busy investing in hotels – and migrants from the African mainland, who are looking for work in those hotels. The original population has largely emigrated or now receives remittances from abroad. More Cape Verdeans live abroad than in their own country: there are 476,000 Cape Verdeans spread over the 10 islands, while 500,000 live in Europe or the USA. The number of international migrants visiting the islands each year is rising steeply.[11]

Cambodia is another country that is busy investing in tourism. In order to interest foreign investors, Koh Kong island is more or less for sale (Wongruang and Wiriyapong 2008). Besides the reservation of 10,000 ha for the building of hotels, casinos, etc., there are far-advanced plans to link the island to the mainland. The terms for foreign investors are highly favourable and a grab for land has arisen in anticipation of the realisation of the plans. Through land grabbing, the price for a plot on the beach has risen in just one year from USD 5 to USD 150 per square metre.

Retirement and residential migration

One of the more invisible developments contributing to the land grab is the rapid increase in 'retirement' (or 'residential') migration. In response to the increased cost of living, many people aged 55 or over are seeking a comfortable existence in a cheap and sunny environment that has a friendly and caring population. Large groups from the USA settle every year in Central and South America. Most potential emigrants use the internet to carry out a comparative search into the requirements (visas, etc.) and living conditions in the countries that interest them. People who want to settle in Mexico, Costa Rica or Panama, for example, can do so as pensionados (retirees), rentistas (foreigners with guaranteed incomes) or investors.[12] In Costa Rica, pensionados must prove that they receive pensions of at least USD 600 a month, change at least USD 500 a month into the local currency (*colones*) and stay in Costa Rica for at least four months each year. For rentistas, somewhat larger amounts are involved, namely USD 1000 a month for at least five years and a length of stay of at least six months per year. Neither category is required to pay any tax. There are many favourable arrangements to allow investors to set up their own businesses. You can call yourself an investor only if you invest a minimum of USD 200,000. Investors in the export trade, tourism or reafforestation can benefit from various financial incentives (Wold 1998). You need rather more money to settle in some countries than in others, but the settlement requirements for foreigners are generally favourable.[13]

Many settle in condominium-like neighbourhoods with their own facilities, their own administration and their own rules, for example, rules that forbid or permit the keeping of pets, parking on site or sounding car horns. The local authority often has little say in the running of these gated communities (Dixon *et al.* 2006).

Although it is not easy to discover the extent of retirement communities (there are no reliable statistics on this 'invasion of the elderly', partly because the

[11]The number is currently estimated at 250,000 (Grassi and Évora 2007).
[12]It is also possible to apply for a visa as a 'relative' (in the context of family reunion) or as an 'expat' (in which case one must be working for an international organisation).
[13]Every country therefore sets its own conditions. One may settle in Panama as a rentista, for example, if one receives a pension of USD 750 a month and has ca. USD 225,000 in the bank.

population is often only temporarily present), it is a worldwide phenomenon. Such communities have arisen in many places.[14] Retirement migration is becoming an increasingly important phenomenon not only in Mexico and Central America (as a reception area for the USA and Canada), but also in the Maghreb countries and in South Africa. There is also a remarkable growth in such migration in Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia (Dixon *et al.* 2006).

Land purchases by migrants in their countries of origin

The land grab is also caused, arguably, by the purchases made by international migrants who live either temporarily or permanently in Europe, the USA or other destination regions. The past decade has seen a large growth in long-distance migration, often South–South, but also to Europe, the USA and the Gulf States. As a result, large parts of the populations of many developing countries have fanned out over many countries (Sheffer 2003, 104–5). The Asian diaspora is estimated to comprise at least 60 million people (examples are China with 35 million people, India with 20 million and the Philippines with 7 million). The Latin American (i.e. Colombian, Brazilian, Peruvian and Venezuelan) diaspora numbers over 25 million people. African examples of diasporic states include Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa; some of the smaller diasporic states are Somalia, Ghana, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Gambia and the Cape Verde islands (Adepoju *et al.* 2008).

A considerable flow of remittances has arisen and national governments are increasingly engaged in devising policies to further encourage migrants to transfer money to their families in their countries of origin or to invest it there. Research has shown that a considerable part of the remittances is used to buy houses and land (Cotula 2004).[15] According to de Haas (2003), who did research in Todgha Oasis in the south of Morocco, international migrants invest more in land than non-migrant households. Migrants also use their money to formalise property rights, to rent or lease land, or to take up sharecropping. In some instances, migrating family members are better endowed when land is divided following a death, because as migrants they have made a larger contribution to the family income than their non-migrant siblings (de Haas 2003).

Migrants purchase land and houses in order to have a safety net (a nest egg) and to maintain ties. That the purchase of land ‘overseas’ by migrants is good business is shown, for example, in a trade fair that is organised in Spain each year for Ecuadorean migrants. Ecuadorean estate agents attend the fair in order to assist migrants to realise their plans (Van Moppes and Schapendonk 2007).

The foreignisation of space and local development

As I have shown, the global land grab – taken in a broader sense – is causing radical changes in the use and ownership of land. There is a strong growth worldwide of landownership by foreigners, and in many instances the land falls into the hands of long-distance actors (absentees), not those of people from the local community.

[14]Examples in Mexico include Chapala, Mexicali, Los Cabos and San Miguel de Allende (with a combined total of some 5500 pensionados originating from the USA and Canada).
[15]Cotula (2004) provides an overview of the literature, which shows that a substantial proportion is used for the purchase of land.

Now that we have a broader picture of processes underlying the global land grab, it is clear that this might offer advantages for the development possibilities of local communities; there are, however, many limitations. On the positive side, the land can make a contribution by lining the national treasury and providing extra financial resources. The local population can profit from new employment (e.g. jobs in the food and/or tourist sector, the setting up of ICT businesses), new markets (American tourists, particularly the retired, are big spenders), and improvements in amenities and infrastructure. The growing demand for goods and services can promote food production and local employment. The use of land for nature reserves can put a brake on deforestation, while the growing of biofuels and other crops can ensure that agriculture again provides farmers with a reasonable income. Farmers who wish to sell their land can profit from the rising land prices and use the money to make fresh investments. And, lastly, contacts with foreign individuals and businesses can have a positive effect if they lead to new ideas and more innovative plans.

In practice, however, the acquisition of land by outsiders is often accompanied by negative effects. The poorer groups are usually the first to lose their land (distress sales) – especially if they do not possess formal property rights despite large-scale land titling programmes, as people with only customary rights enjoy little protection from the law – and new means of livelihood are not always readily available. It is often too expensive to buy land elsewhere, and the overwhelming majority of the poor do not possess the skills needed to become eligible for newly created employment (e.g. in ICT parks). As a result, newly created jobs are often taken up by better qualified or cheaper migrants from elsewhere. Where the land purchases are intended for tourist development, this sometimes results in increased criminality, while the creation of gated communities often disrupts social cohesion and cultural identity. A large inflow of tourists can mean an onslaught on natural resources (e.g. water). As a direct consequence of the land grab, local communities see their home territories radically changed by an invasion of agro-industrial firms, hotels or elderly tourists. They no longer feel at home or are forced to move elsewhere, with or without adequate compensation.

Although the ownership of large areas of land by foreigners is not a new phenomenon,[16] its scale and intensity are. The context has changed dramatically and the issue needs a conceptual update: the redistribution of land is no longer a local question of social justice (land for those who work it) or efficiency (land for the most efficient producer). The competition for land now takes place less exclusively in an agricultural–rural context: land purchases are also intended for nature conservation (in the case of 'empty' areas) or urban extensions (on the rural–urban periphery). Moreover, land questions are increasingly complex matters of competing claims between various groups of local and long-distance actors; in addition to national and local governments, private individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), financial institutions and the real estate sector are also involved in the issue. In addition to existing complex political dynamics around land-based social relations within and across social classes and groups in local communities, we also see

[16]In mining, agriculture and forestry, extremely large holdings financed by international capital were in the hands of agricultural and industrial enterprises at an early date. For example, a large part of the Paraguayan Chaco was owned by an Argentinian, Carlos Casado: in 1886 he owned an area larger than the whole of Switzerland (over 5 million ha). From that perspective, Benetton is small fry.

present-day transactions take place over large distances between external actors: land markets have been globalised and the actors are increasingly mobile. In many instances, enclaves of privilege arise; these are new forms of enclosure that often lead not only to fragmentation and segregation, but also to large-scale displacements of local populations.

Final reflections and conclusion: 'codes of conduct' and beyond

While migrants from Africa, Asia and Latin America migrate to the USA, Europe and the Gulf States, there is a rush for land in the opposite direction: foreign investors are attracted by the land markets in the South. The global land grab is much stronger and more extensive than is generally highlighted. The rush for land is broader than the purchase of land for food and fuel, and involves a large number of different actors who use the land for a wide variety of purposes (tourism, nature conservation, urban expansion, etc.). Many land deals are currently taking place in Africa, as well as in many parts of Asia and Latin America. Land stays where it is, but the transfer of property rights has a direct impact on the poorer sections in local communities that do not have sufficient power to either control the situation or benefit from it. Processes of land grabbing are increasingly a threat to the capacity of the 'bottom billion'[17] to enjoy freedom and lead valuable lives (Sen 1999).

To the extent that attempts are made to control processes of land grabbing, much emphasis is given to the potential benefits of developing codes of conduct for foreign land acquisition (Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, 2; also Cotula *et al.* 2009). Codes of conduct are developed to ensure that investors adhere to a number of key principles, for example, they should respect existing land and resource rights, guarantee food security and ensure transparency (Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009; Cotula *et al.* 2009). The following criteria are often included:

- Transparency in negotiations: existing local landholders must be informed and involved in negotiations over land deals. Free, prior and informed consent is the standard to be upheld.
- Respect for existing land rights, including customary and common property rights: those who lose land should be compensated and rehabilitated to an equivalent livelihood.
- Sharing of benefits: the local community should benefit, not lose, from foreign investments in agriculture (e.g. through contract farming or out-grower schemes). Explicit enforcement measures are needed for cases in which agreed-upon investments or forms of compensation are not forthcoming.
- Environmental sustainability: careful environmental impact assessment and monitoring are required in order to ensure sound and sustainable agricultural production practices that do not lead to the depletion of soils, the loss of critical biodiversity, increased greenhouse gas emissions or the significant diversion of water from other human or environmental uses.
- Adherence to national trade policies: when national food security is at risk (e.g. in the case of acute droughts), domestic supplies should have priority. Foreign

[17]In 2008, at least 1.4 billion people were living on USD 1.25 a day (see Chen and Ravallion 2008).

investors should not have a right to export during acute national food crises (Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, 3–4).

In the current debate, the extent to which international land deals create opportunities (investment, employment, etc.) and mitigate risks (displacement, etc.) is assumed to depend mainly on contractual arrangements between investors and local groups. According to the World Bank – which is currently developing 'a set of principles for large-scale agro-investment' – the challenge is to ensure that investments made by foreign actors respect the rights of existing land users and increase productivity and welfare in line with existing strategies for economic development. Foreign actors are playing an increasingly important role in 'local' development.

In order to improve the situation of local groups and prevent their marginalisation, it is indeed necessary that contractual arrangements become more transparent and that local populations have better opportunities to participate. Investors should adhere to a number of key principles, such as respecting land and resource rights, ensuring food security, etc. It is also clear, however, that these codes of conduct or contractual arrangements will neither halt nor turn the tide.

Processes of land grabbing are broader and deeper than assumed (these are not restricted to large-scale agro-investment), and many countries neither have legal or procedural mechanisms in place to protect local rights, nor take into account local interests, livelihoods or welfare. There is evidence that the large-scale acquisition of land often poses considerable risks, which include the displacement of local populations, the undermining or negating of existing rights, corruption, food insecurity, local and global environmental damage, the loss of livelihoods, nutritional deprivation, social polarisation and political instability. Media reports and empirical research show that large-scale processes of land grabbing are often at the expense of local populations. A lack of transparency and of checks and balances in contract negotiations creates a breeding ground for corruption. Insecure use rights on state-owned land, inaccessible registration procedures, vaguely defined productive use requirements, legislative gaps, and compensation that is limited to the loss of improvements like crops and trees all undermine the position of local communities, especially the poorer sections therein (GRAIN 2008, Cotula *et al.* 2009).

In addition, codes of conduct will not help to change the underlying structural factors driving the seven processes. They will even pave the way for further land commoditisation, while contributing to the fragmentation of space (investment conditions reflecting the negotiating power of local groups). One of the main problems is that many local governments lack the necessary tools to control the externally determined situation. Local governments tend to be either not accountable to the local population, or insufficiently strong to be able to counterbalance the power of external actors and/or the central state (which often have a major interest in stimulating economic growth, sometimes to the detriment of local populations). Many local governments are faced with a fundamental dilemma: should they create an enabling and friendly environment for foreign investors and protect those investors, or secure the rights of their local populations? And how should they deal with new and foreign populations?[18]

[18]In discussions about how to ensure that local populations will benefit, analysis tends to be rather static: little attention is paid to the fact that investments in agricultural land attract new populations. The local population is presented as 'given', and insufficient attention is paid to

Rather than focusing on large-scale land deals in isolation, and analysing them case by case, it is necessary to incorporate such issues into a broader land governance agenda. In the current discussion about codes of conduct, much attention is paid to micro space (contractual terms in relation to specific land deals), without questioning how the mosaic of land deals can be incorporated into strategic planning that promotes equitable and sustainable development. Instead of adopting a 'technicist, top-down approach to land governance' and focusing on administrative aspects of land governance, we should acknowledge that land policies are highly politicised. Land governance is supposed to strike a balance between protecting rights and promoting the productive use of land; in other words, between economic progress, sustainable land use and social justice. But is it not possible to do this in politically neutral terms. Struggles for land will also be 'on the move': creating a win-win situation is hardly possible, given the dynamics of diverging interests, competing claims, and processes of inclusion and exclusion (Borras and Franco 2010, Cousins 2009). The question is, how can land governance contribute to improving the capacity of poor people to control access to land, and to maximising opportunities for inclusive development? A range of new, often opposing pressures and interests need to be reconciled. Finally, it is time to reflect critically on whether neoliberal policies – and the principle of private, exclusive and individuated property rights – are compatible with the long-term goals of equitable and sustainable development.

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the mobility of the population and the increasing tensions between newcomers and the traditional population. Given the inflow of investment, it is not enough to protect the rights of existing populations: newcomers will arrive along with the new investment flows, resulting in new patterns of competing claims.

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Annelies Zoomers is Professor of International Development Studies (IDS) at Utrecht University. She has published extensively about various development themes, focusing on rural development and changing land policies, sustainable livelihood, tourism and international migration. IDS is currently involved in various research projects related to oil palm expansion in Indonesia, residential tourism in Latin America, and projects related to land grabbing in Asia and Africa. Email: a.zoomers@geo.uu.nl